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of
the Fon (Benin)

Marjolijn Aalders Grool

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P.O. Box 45 06 43

50881 Köln

Germany

e-mail: info@koeppede.de

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Verbal Art of the Fon (Benin)

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Promotiecommissie:

Promotor: Prof. Dr. Maarten P.G.M. Mous

Co-promotor: Dr. Felix K. Ameka

Overige leden: Prof. Dr. Kofi Anyidoho (University of Ghana, Legon)

Dr. Daniela Merolla (Leiden University)

Prof. Dr. Enoch Aboh (University of Amsterdam)

Dr. Maarten Kossmann (Leiden University)

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Abbreviations

1	:	first person
2	:	second person
3	:	third person
A	:	Abomey
AC	:	Abomey-Calavi
AJ	:	adjunct
aFOC	:	argument focus
ANA	:	anaphoric pronoun
AUX...pFOC	:	non-perfective marker
Ay	:	Ayou
CI	:	clause introducer
CJds	:	conjunction different subject
CJss	:	conjunction same subject
CL	:	clitic pronoun
CP	:	complement
DEF	:	definite nominal suffix
DEI	:	deictic
DEM _N	:	demonstrative pronoun, near
DEM _R	:	demonstrative pronoun, remote
GEN	:	genitive
FUT	:	future (direct speech)
ILW	:	illusory wish marker
IMP	:	imperative
INDF	:	indefinite nominal suffix
INH	:	inhibition marker
IP	:	ideophone
IQ	:	indirect question
IRM	:	irrealis marker
LOC	:	locative noun
LOG	:	logophoric pronoun
MDM	:	meta-discourse marker (p. 185)
NEG	:	negative
NP	:	noun phrase
OSM	:	out-of-sequence marker (p. 165)
OM	:	optative marker
ONO	:	onomatopoeia
PL	:	plural
POS	:	possessive adjective
PURP	:	purpose

QF	:	quantifier
QM	:	question marker
RCM	:	recurrence marker
REL	:	relative pronoun
RES	:	resumptive pronoun
RIM	:	reported irrealis marker
RM	:	routine marker
SG	:	singular
SP	:	specific
SPM	:	suspense marker
TOP _{CL}	:	clausal topic
TOP _N	:	nominal topic
VOC	:	vocative
WH	:	what-question

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¹ V.I.M. stands for 'Vrouwen in Marketing', a network of marketingwomen that was founded in 1983.

Preliminary remarks

Preliminary remarks

One of the books I read before arriving in present-day Benin was ‘Tristes Tropiques’, written by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who argued that the ‘savage’ mind has the same structures as the ‘civilized’ mind. Indigenous peoples may be illiterate, but that does not forestall them from proficiency in elaborate and characteristic art forms (Lévi-Strauss 1980). I came to Benin in February 1975 to stay there for about two and a half years.² I was very interested in indigenous verbal art. Hence, I started learning Fongbe in the summer of 1975. Fongbe is a Gbe language of the Kwa family (Williamson and Blench 2000). After five months of lessons, I spoke sufficient Fongbe to go to Cotonou’s markets on my own. I was told that life in the rural areas strongly differed from life in the towns of Porto Novo, Cotonou and Parakou. Storytelling was said to be extinct in the urban neighbourhood. I would have to look for it in the rural areas. It was about time to get out of town and to visit the rural areas in the south of Benin.

As a foreigner, I had to ask the Security Minister the authorization to travel. I got the documents in due course, and I travelled to the villages Ayou, Abomey-Calavi and Abomey. There, I collected the corpus between April and June 1976. I recorded the performances of 37 texts of Fongbe verbal art on consumer audiocassettes. I completed the transcription and a first translation into French during my stay in Benin. I digitized the originally analogue recordings in 2006. Several stories in the corpus are similar to those collected and translated by French colonial functionaries in the first half of the twentieth century. The size of the corpus is about 57 000 words. The spoken texts approximately comprise 12 000 utterances. The quantity of the data together with the digital recordings allows examining and analysing the performance and its elements, as well as the grammatical and narrative aspects.

The main objectives of my research are to understand the techniques and skills of the performers, and to find out how they structure the narrative discourse of the Fon genre **hwènùxó** (see chapter 7).

Let us first consider the performers. Six women told 20 stories, seven men told 15 stories, and a young girl and a boy each told a story. The 15 performers of the corpus were illiterate, and they did not have any notes for help. Nevertheless, all Fon performers delivered a very elaborate performance of a story. The performance made the skills of the performer manifest. Especially the septuagenarian performers were very accomplished storytellers.

² The country’s name became Benin on 26 October 1975. Until then it was known under its colonial name Dahomey (see p. 40).

One of the main features of Fon performance is orality. Verbal art is a spoken discourse, in which written texts are absent. The Fon performer is keen on improvisation in storytelling. This improvisation has nothing to do with the European practices of recall or reproduction. The performer unexpectedly inserts new clues in a story, and the story takes shape during the performance. The cheering reaction of the audience makes clear that the audience appreciates unexpected new turns. At the very first session in Ayou, I noticed that the performer sometimes started a new development in the story with the single word *éé* that he set apart by a long silence. Even if one does not speak Fongbe, one realises that the meaning is ‘then’, that the performer announces a new phase in the story. The silence creates suspense, and therewith affects the audience. The silence is also part of the performer’s strategy to think about ‘What am I going to say next?’ The performer is shaping the performance by the use of silence, ‘timing’; hence, it is opposite to the wordsmithing of the writer.

The performance of Fongbe storytelling is a stand-up performance that the performer stages without showing any hesitation. The performance itself makes the delivery of the society’s heritage so delightful.

The nature of the performance

One might entertain the idea that the discourse of an oral performance resembles the discourse of a book. In fact, when it comes to performance of a story, the difference between the delivery of speech and written text becomes obvious. The performance is an on-going process that leaves no time for introspection, and the audience immediately reacts and provides an interactive incentive. This process of creation and interaction widely differs from the process of writing and reading. The writing of a, e.g. scientific, book is a process in which the author works on his own by doing research and writing the book. Reading a book is also a lonesome affair. The reader is free to read and re-read a book. A reader may turn over the pages and use techniques as close reading to understand and interpret the writer’s intentions.

Add to this that still many people consider the oral performance inferior to the printed book. The Nigerian writer Chinweizu made a point in his critical review of the prejudice that the African urban elite holds against ‘oral and folk’. His plea for more attention to the oral performance of the artists in the villages who are still planting, harvesting and hunting is based on the estimation that these tales represent some 95 % of the fiction of the African continent. Chinweizu found fault with the narrow-minded Western mind-set when he stated the following:

Eurocentric literary academics, in and outside Africa, have long been prejudiced against oral works; against works in African languages; against

works by anonymous authors; against works by and for the non-elite ‘folk’; against works of ‘impure’ or ‘applied’ literature which address themselves to social issues of the moment. On the other hand, they have a strong prejudice in favour of written works; in favour of works in European languages; in favour of works by named individuals; in favour of works by and for members of an elite; in favour of works of ‘pure’ literature which are said to divorce themselves from ‘local’ and ‘social’ issues and to aspire to ‘universality’ (Chinweizu 1988: XX-XXI).

Let us finally consider the general definitions of folklore to understand the nature of **hwènùxó**. The concept of folklore should be given careful consideration, in view of the diversity and adversity of the many descriptions and concepts with regard to folklore. Several monumental studies of oral recitations provided us with descriptions of folklore in distinct parts of the world, but they often have nothing in common. Approaches widely differ. Some emphasize the aesthetic quality of folklore, while others describe the structure of the plot and the functions of the characters. Dundes described the immense beauty of folklore (Dundes 1972). On the other hand, Propp showed that the morphology of Russian folktales has a ‘universal’ storyline (Propp 1958).

Anthropologists customarily refer to indigenous stories as folklore. Bascom proposed the concept of verbal art as a definition (Bascom 1955: 245). Important forms of verbal art are myths, legends and folktales. Bascom considers verbal art as a sub-type of a broader class that he calls prose narrative. The prose distinguishes the stories from other forms of verbal art such as for example proverbs, riddles, ballads and poems on the basis of strictly formal characteristics (Bascom 1965: 3). In my view, the corpus that I recorded is part of the verbal art of West Africa.

The analysis of verbal art

Anthropologists as well as linguists developed many ways to describe and to analyse the data of their fieldwork. A random survey of the numerous publications shows the diversity in approaches, in line with the authors’ objectives, background, insights and preferences.

Let us first consider whether there is a specific literary theory that we can use to analyse the stories of the corpus.³ In other words, which method is appropriate to account for West African verbal art? Since the early example of Aristotle’s ‘Poetics’ literary theories took shape in the field of rhetoric and eloquence (Aristotle 1995).

³ The word ‘theory’ is widely used to indicate a descriptive analysis; in my view, either ‘framework’ or ‘model’ is more appropriate in the field of discourse studies.

After the French revolution, the debate got a more ideological veneer. Nowadays, there are as many theories as there are ideologies, and most of these are restricted to their ideological frames (Ducrot and Todorov 1972: 336). Moreover, theories that exclusively focus on one specific genre are bound to the features of that genre, which makes them hardly applicable to the analysis of a different genre. The studies in postmodern narratology focus on the prose of the novel (Herman and Vervaeck 2005: 107ff.). This framing makes narratology inappropriate to analyse indigenous stories.

A number of publications offer an appropriate concept to approach verbal art as a performance. One of these particularly deals with the African continent. Finnegan gets the credit of having written a survey of 'African oral literature' (Finnegan 2012). This seminal publication discusses the 'oral' nature of the African unwritten literature and gives many examples of the various genres in different parts of Africa. Finnegan discusses the various forms of poetry, prose narrative and songs that occur on the continent.

In the sixties of the last century, two distinct groups of academic men took interest in the theories of the pre-war Prague School, especially in the publications on stylistics and poetics by Jakobson and Mukárovsky (Jakobson 1960; Mukárovsky 1970). Their approach is rooted in the theories of the Russian Formalists, the linguistic theory of Saussure (Saussure 1972), the theories of the Prague School, including Jakobson, and the anthropological works of Lévi-Strauss, who coined the word 'structuralism'. In France, Europe, several scholars of different disciplines aim at formulating a semiotic theory. The group is called the French Structuralists (see pp. 35f.). At about the same time on the American continent, several folklorists and anthropological linguists also become followers of the pre-war Prague School and Jakobson. They aim at formulating a descriptive theory of the ethnography of speaking. The theory should account for the patterns of language use across speech communities of human groups. Bauman aims at the explanation of culture patterning, the fact that individuals are oriented to participation in several and overlapping speech communities (Bauman and Sherzer 1974: 16).

Structuralism and Ethnopoetics both provide us with a framework of concepts that is helpful to describe the performance of my stories. Therefore, I consider the above-cited approaches and their concepts appropriate to discuss the performance of storytelling. One of the most remarkable features of the performance is the alternation of utterances and silences. The description of the corpus must incorporate this alternation. The performer speaks utterances that often are just a part of a clause. One single utterance or a set of utterances, or even two sets of utterances convey a meaning. Here, Austin's concept of 'speech act' seems to be the appropriate approach to transcribe the performance into the utterances of the performer: "What we have to study is not the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech

situation” (Austin 1962: 138). Therefore, the transcription of the performances into written text certainly is a matter of theoretical consideration, for the transcription must report the details in the oral production of the utterances that the performer delivered. However, the performer also addresses the audience by making gestures, and the audience sometimes interacts with the performer by showing approval or by making additional remarks. Notice that the recordings of the corpus have limits in so far that they are audio– instead of video–recordings. However, the studies on transcription are few in number, for the majority of studies in folklore focused on the content of the stories. The publication by Serzisko is also very helpful to tackle this issue. Serzisko described the discourse of the Ik, a people from northeast Uganda. He bases his description on the segmenting of speech acts by pauses. He considers the pauses as the essential criterion to note how native speakers segment narrative discourse (Serzisko 1992: 4).

Since people live on our planet, they tell stories. Orality is the main feature of storytelling. The objective of my book is to analyse and to describe the performance and the discourse of Fongbe storytelling. However, the majority of modern literary theories explicitly accounts for written and printed material.⁴ Storytelling principles apply also to non-fiction narratives, as the television anchormen and –women show us every day when they cue their interviews. They also apply to online presentations (Hart 2011: 7). Therefore, we should not limit ourselves to the linguistic and literary instruments but think out of the box, and also look into techniques that the media world and the creative industry use nowadays.

The actual analysis

Today one can hardly imagine the patience that was once required to write down a story, or the imperfection that goes with it. The introduction of tape recorders facilitated the access to indigenous storytelling. Nowadays, the increasing possibilities of hardware, such as laptops and smartphones, as well as dedicated software facilitate the digital recording and saving of material in the field. The invention of new software led to a wide array of new analysing techniques. However, information technology as such does not enable one single method to come to a coherent synthesis. The big advantage is the digitization of the recordings, which allows for a far more detailed analysis than in the past. It permits to measure the use of time by the performer and to use graphical representations to analyse the storytelling process, in addition to the literary and linguistic techniques.

⁴ These theories and methods of analysis must be distinguished from studies in conversational analysis and theories on drama and comedy that study scenarios.

A study of the performance of Fongbe storytelling has to account for the nature of the stories, the transcription of the stories, and the ‘things’ that the performers do. Henceforth I will describe and analyse the corpus from this perspective by using a multi-angle capture. This has the advantage that I can use several concepts from different fields when I try to find the answer how the performers deliver an elaborate piece of art.

The description and analysis of the corpus is deductive, as Barthes requires (Barthes 1966: 2). It must account for the event as well as for the speech of the performance.

Therefore, I used the following angles. First, the performance is described as a cultural event that happens in a specific context and that conveys particular elements. Secondly, a linguistic approach and a statistical analysis are used to analyse the structuring of the discourse. The structuring of the content requires an analysis of the way of speaking of the performer. The description of style requires a linguistic approach as well. Finally, I analysed the performance by comparing different versions of similar stories told in different villages by different performers.

The first angle consists of an ethnographic approach that describes the event within its cultural context. The ethnographic approach deals with two perspectives, that is the point of view of the foreigner ‘from the outside’, as well as the points of references ‘from the inside’ that provide us with the cultural landmarks of the stories. I consider the performance a speech act within the rural Fon community that is meaningful with reference to relevant contexts and settings. The performers called the stories of the corpus **hwènùxó**. The performers said that **hwènùxó** are stories that happened in the past or stories that might have happened in the past. This leads to the following kind of questions: What is the background of **hwènùxó**? What is the nature of **hwènùxó**? What is the setting of the performance? The description of narrative elements leads among others to the following questions: What is the world of the stories? Who are the characters? What are the issues? What is the genre?

The second angle is the linguistic approach that describes the structuring of the discourse. Here, I consider the performance a well-formed speech event that the individual performer delivers to meet approval with the audience. The following questions have to be considered: What are the features of the speech event? What other features can be found? Is there a pattern in the timing of the performer? What is the structure of the narrative discourse? Are there specific grammatical constructions? Together with a linguistic approach, a statistical analysis is used to analyse the structuring of the discourse with the pauses, the utterances and the speech rate as parameters. The structuring of the content requires an analysis of the way of speaking of the performer. The analysis involves as well the language of the discourse as the production of the successive events of the story. I will also discuss the way of speaking of the audience in terms of interactions and interventions. Unfortunately, I

cannot compare the recordings and transcriptions of the corpus to other material, because neither Fongbe recordings nor transcriptions are publicly available.

The third approach is the description of the style elements and the stylistic devices. The following questions are considered: Are there specific figures of speech? What are the most frequently used stylistic devices? What stylistic devices have the character of a general rule? What style elements are personal choices?

The fourth angle is the analysis of the narrative performance. Questions to consider are the following: Do the stories have an underlying framework? What are the cultural and metalinguistic codes? What is the quintessence of the creation of the performance of storytelling?

In order to analyse the performance more closely, a number of individual versions of similar stories are compared in order to see whether the performers tell identical stories or whether they use identical elements to deliver a different plot or whether they improvise and make up the story during the performance with well-known ingredients and unexpected additions.

Together, these approaches will lead to an understanding of the creation of the performance. Questions to be answered are: What are the elements the performer uses to create a performance? Is there a universal morphology or storyline in **hwènùxó**? Is the performance a recalled reproduction of a well-known story?

Chronologically, I transcribed the stories in 1976 before I made a first manuscript of the segmenting of the utterances in 1977. I restarted the research for this book in 2006. The first step was the quantitative analysis of the pauses and the segmentation of the utterances. This analysis led to the understanding of the occurrence of the definite particle **ɔ** as a final clausal particle that indicates the start of a new paragraph in a tail-head construction. The particle also functions as a definite marker that introduces the central participant. The performer places it at the end of a noun phrase to track the central participant. These results were most helpful in understanding the content of the stories. They greatly helped in gaining insight in the roles of the agents and their properties by analysing the Fongbe transcriptions and the French glosses. However, to make it easier to understand the stories, one should have some insight in the religion and in the role of the creatures that figure in the stories. Therefore, in this book, I will first explain the cultural and religious background of the stories, before embarking upon the structuring of the discourse, the figures of style, and the analysis of the performance of Fongbe storytelling.

The successive chapters

The book is composed of five parts. The first part gives a survey of the event of a storytelling session, its background and the recording. The first chapter gives an

overview of a number of ethnographic publications about the former Kingdom of **Danxomè** and an overview of previous publications on Fongbe grammar and Fon verbal art and publications on stories and storytelling. The chapter is completed with an analysis of the basics of stories, and a discussion on the semiotic theory of the French Structuralists and the American ethnology of communication. Chapter 2 describes the project of the recording of the corpus in the rural areas of the South of Benin. Chapter 3 describes the event of the performance and the aspects of the performance. Chapter 4 concludes part 1.

The second part describes the elements, topics and genre of the corpus. Chapter 5 describes the elements of Fongbe stories, such as the role of the central participant, the occurrence of religious devices, and the role of the pair of agents. The main topic of the stories concerns power and power relations, which I discuss in chapter 6. Chapter 7 deals with the genre of **hwènùxó**. I will discuss the conclusions of part 2 in chapter 8.

The third part presents the analysis of the structuring of the discourse. I will describe the pauses by which the performers segment the narrative discourse in utterances and silence in chapter 9. Chapter 10 presents the multi-functional use of the definite particle **ḡ**. The particle is used to determine nouns as well as clauses. I will describe the way of speaking of the performer in chapter 11. The occurrence of direct and reported speech, the use of rhetorical phenomena, and the production of the successive events will be discussed. Chapter 12 finishes part 3 with the conclusions on the structuring of the discourse.

The fourth part gives a survey of the stylistic devices that the performers use in the narrative. Chapter 13 deals with the grammatical choices. The use of words is described in chapter 14. In chapter 15, the stylistic devices of the songs are discussed. The conclusions of the fourth part are reported in chapter 16.

The fifth part of this book analyses the creative process by which the performer creates the story. I will analyse the basic underlying framework that characterizes the stories in chapter 17. Chapter 18 describes the clues to find the referential and metalinguistic codes. In chapter 19, I will finally explain the concept and the technique of the storyboard, as well as the use and practice of the storyboard by the performers.

I will present my final remarks and the general conclusions in chapter 20. The stories as well as the English translation will be published in ‘Voodoo stories of the Fon (Benin)’ (Aalders Grool 2013 b).⁵

⁵ Forthcoming at the end of 2013.

Part 1: The event, its background and the recording

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In the first part of this book, I will give a survey of the event of a session, its background and the collection and recording of the corpus. The first chapter gives an overview of the huge number of ethnographic publications about the former Kingdom of **Danxomè** and an overview of previous publications on Fongbe grammar and Fon verbal art. The chapter continues with a discussion of several publications on stories and storytelling. I will complete the chapter with a discussion of the basics of stories, and a discussion on the semiotic theory of the French Structuralists and the American ethno-poetics. I will describe the project of the collection and recording of the corpus in the rural areas of the South of Benin, and the situation in Benin at that time in chapter 2. I will discuss the event of the performance and the aspects of the performance in chapter 3. Chapter 4 concludes part I.

1. Benin: history, religion and verbal art

Before embarking upon the narrative and linguistic features of the corpus of Fongbe stories, I will give an overview of the many publications about Benin and the Fon people who, in the past, often were called Dahomeans. These publications pointed out the historical and religious elements that come back in the stories of the corpus. The chapter presents a short overview of the history, culture and religion of the Fon people, based on historical and ethnographic publications. This chapter also gives an overview of the available Fongbe grammars and textbooks. I will give an overview of the publications about the verbal art of the Fon people and those about neighbouring cultures. Finally, I will describe the basics of stories. I will discuss the semiotic model as proposed by Barthes and Eco, as well as Bauman's ethno-poetic approach of performance as action and event (Barthes 1964, Barthes 1966, Barthes 1970, Eco, 1966, Bauman 1974, Bauman 1978, Bauman 1986, Bauman 2002). Finally, I will give a brief overview of the storyboard technique that I will use later in this book to explain the creation of the performance.

1.1. The history of present-day Benin

The history of present-day Benin is extensively described since the 17th century. Benin has a remarkable past, which dates back long before the French colonial administration dominated the country for seventy years. Many European travellers visited the kingdom and wrote about their "adventures". The descriptions vary from historical to ethnographic studies. They consist also of specialist research on the institutions at the royal court in the upland capital Abomey. After independence in

1960, the Republic of Dahomey adopted the gallicized name of the kingdom, though the territory of the republic exceeded that of the kingdom many times. In 1975 Dahomey was renamed Benin.

King Agadja established the kingdom in Abomey in the 18th century. The Fongbe name of the kingdom was **Danxomè**, meaning ‘in the stomach of the god Snake’. Early publications show that visitors were amazed to see that the Kingdom of Abomey was a highly organized society that consisted of military, administrative and religious systems. The outstanding bas-reliefs on the walls of the palace in Abomey are still a tacit witness of that era. The historical and ethnographic study ‘The Fon of Dahomey’ gives a comprehensive overview of the publications hitherto (Argyle 1966). Argyle studied eye-witnesses’ reports amongst which one by the Dutch humanist Dapper ‘Description de l’Afrique’ (1668), the one by the Scottish slave trader Archibald Dalzel ‘The History of Dahomey’ (1793), and one by the explorer Richard Burton ‘A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahomey’ (1864). All these authors described the life at the Dahomean court, including the slave trade, the female army of the Amazons and the yearly ‘Customs’. Verger described the slave trade in the Bight of Benin. The Kingdom of **Danxomè** was one of the bulk traders of the region. From the 17th century the kings of Abomey initiated raids on their neighbours, such as the Nago and the Maxi (Argyle 1966: 8ff.). From about 1740 onwards, slave trade was the key to the kingdom’s economic prosperity. The King’s warlords started wars to capture their neighbours, and traded the captured human beings as a commodity (Verger 1968).

The Kingdom of **Danxomè** was situated within the borders of the present Republic of Benin. Between the 15th and 19th century the kingdom increased its territory and became a very powerful realm in the region. The kingdom that the French called Dahomey started as the tributary state of the Adja Kingdom to the Bashorun of the Oyo, a kingdom of the Yoruba Empire in present-day Nigeria. The kingdom nursed its resentment against the Yoruba and watched for an opportunity to throw off the hated yoke of the Oyo oppressors. Finally, in about 1822 King Guezo successfully declared the independence of his kingdom, and stopped the yearly taxes of ‘40 men, 40 women, 40 shotguns, 400 loads of cowry and coral’ (Glélé 1974: 94). Until then the Oyo were the largest suppliers of slaves in the region, but the Dahomeans subsequently surpassed them by far.

The 19th century was the apogee of the kingdom under the reign of the kings Guezo and Glele. Their perception of kingship transformed the Kingdom of **Danxomè** into a strictly organized theocracy and a military nation. The administration was built as the mirror of the pantheon, where all deities were pairs, like two sides of a coin.

The British government abolished slave trading in 1807. Throughout the 19th century, the West-European governments abolished slave trading one after another.

Brazil, on the contrary, refused to abolish slave trading until 1888. The king of **Danxomè** defiantly persisted in maintaining a close collaboration with the many Brazilian slave traders along the coast. He proclaimed one of them Vice-Roy of Ouidah, after the place in **Danxomè** from where the slaves were shipped. The kingdom refused to make the transition to growing crops (palms) and to exploit palm oil. The British author Bruce Chatwin voiced the history of the kingdom as follows:

In the nineteenth century the Kingdom of Dahomey was a Black Sparta squeezed between the Yoruba tribes of present-day Nigeria and the Ewe tribes of Togo. Her kings had claw marks cut on their temples and were descended from a Princess of Adja-Tado and the leopard who seduced her on the banks of the Mono River. Their people called them ‘Dada’, which means ‘father’ in Fon. Their fiercest regiments were female, and their only source of income was the sale of their weaker neighbours. (Chatwin 1980: 1).

The king was the only person in the kingdom who had a divine status. He had the power to decide about life and death. He was the heir of his subjects, and he controlled the slave caravans from the north (Argyle 1966: 11ff.). The king alone had the right to decide about the life of the captured peoples at the yearly ‘Customs’. The king also decided which of the gods of the captured slaves should be incorporated into the kingdom’s pantheon and cults in order to calm their latent anger. The Third French Republic conquered the kingdom in 1894, after a war that took two years. The Kingdom of **Danxomè** was incorporated in a new country that was called the Republic of Dahomey, and became part of the French colonial territories until the independence of 1960. The French administration installed new chiefs in the villages. This brought along a new hierarchy and new tasks (Désiré Vigan, personal communication, 1976). This shift of power resembles a description of what happened in the Lyela territory in Burkina Faso (Steinbrich 1995: 94). Nonetheless, the influence of religion remained as dominant as before, especially in the rural areas of Benin.

The French left in 1960, and the independent country “La République du Dahomey” was a fact. The start of the young republic was hopeful, but the country soon became politically unstable. Until the seventies of the last century, the structure of the local administration as well as the social fabric in the rural areas remained largely intact, despite the French colonial rule and the successive governments of the independent republic. In 1972, a group of young officers pushed aside the triumvirate that had made up the presidential council until then. From that day, a revolutionary military government governed the republic with Mathieu Kérékou as president. In 1975, the administration changed the name of the country into “La République Populaire du Bénin” (RPB): the People’s Republic of Benin. President Kérékou announced that a communist revolution would change Benin to end “l’exploitation de l’homme par

l'homme", the exploitation of man by man. The administration became a 'scientific Marxist-Leninist state system' that used the rhetoric of the communist revolution, as the following slogans show: "Comptons sur nos propres forces" – We should count on our own strength; and "Mobilisons-nous pour la production" meaning "We should optimize our food production".

It took until December 1989 for President Kérékou to give up the Marxist-Leninist system. An economic crisis preceded this transition. Almost ten years later, a UNDP report openly and explicitly described the harsh situation during that period and the need for a change to transparency and responsibility (PNUD 1998: 30). A national conference was organised from 19 to 28 February 1990. Chair was Monseigneur De Souza, the archbishop of Cotonou. At his instigation, a temporary administration was installed before elections took place. In 1991 presidential candidate Nicephore Soglo promised to lift the ban on the **vodun** religion for reasons of his own. Elections were prepared, and on 21 March 1991, Nicephore Soglo was elected as president. He re-installed the **vodun** cults and divination took up its substantial role in Benin (Agboton 1997: 61ff.; see also 1.3. and 2.1.). Several publications describe these events and the political changes (Banégas 1994, Elwert-Kretschmer 1995, Mayrargue 1995, 2002; Bierschenk and Sardan 2003).

1.2. The organisation of the Kingdom of **Danxomè**

One of the characteristics of the culture of the Kingdom of **Danxomè** is the principle of duality in the royal administration (Argyle 1966: 76). The concept of duality originates from the successive pantheons that are worshipped in the Kingdom of **Danxomè** since the reign of King Agadja. The important dignitaries of the administration of **Danxomè** were made up of pairs. The main rule at the court was that each dignitary controlled another dignitary, and viceversa. The pairs were a perfect balance of countervailing power: each function had restrictions that were added to the power of the paired function. Altogether, there were seven ministers at the court of **Danxomè**. All ministers were men. However, a woman counterpart supervised and controlled each of them.

The principle of duality was ingrained in the royal court of **Danxomè** in numerous ways. The king governed together with the **migàn**, the prime minister and regent, and the **mewu**, the minister of external relations and chief of the king's house. The **migàn** and the **mewu** were to a great extent complementary antipodes. The **migàn** sat on the right hand of the king, and the **mewu** sat on the king's left hand. The place of the ministers was also a symbolic position; the right and the left hand had a specific connotation in the kingdom: right meaning 'wise', and left meaning

‘powerful’ (see also Appendix 2 A 4: 153, 155, AC 16: 16 and p. 91).⁶ The **migàn** was the spokesperson of the commoners who was authorized to address the king. The **mewu** was the king’s linguist who spoke to the commoners, since the king did not deign to speak to them (Argyle 1966: 72). The kingdom was a military state; to that end, two more ministers sat at the right hand of the king: the **ganhun**, the minister of war, and his assistant the **kpòsu**, meaning ‘leopard’s man’. In total four ministers sat at the king’s left hand: next to the **mewu** sat the **ajàxo**, the **tàkpò** and the **sogàn**. The **ajàxo**, ‘voice of Adja’, was the Minister of Cults, the chief of the priests and priestesses, and the chief of the intelligence services. The **tàkpò** ‘the minister in charge of the king’s confiscations’, was the Minister of property– and rural taxes. The **sogàn**, ‘chief of the horses’, was the Minister of war loot (Garcia 1988: 22). The horse is an item in several stories; it is a symbol of power and wealth (AC 3, AC 8, AC 10). I will discuss the topic of power in chapter 6.

A daily religious observance showed the institutionalized regime of the theocracy. The king daily consulted two ministers on the will of the gods and the advice of his personal guardian spirit. The first dignitary was the **ajàxo**, the chief of the priests and priestesses. The second dignitary was the **bokòndò**, the diviner and traditional doctor (Garcia 1988: 23).

The king was the only inhabitant of the kingdom who had the privilege to live in a **singbo**, ‘big house’, a two-storey palace (Garcia 1988: 22, 31). The architecture of the royal palace in Abomey made the duality visible. The king’s forty wives and their children lived in separate huts around the palace. Furthermore, the firstborn out of one of the king’s marriages or relations had no birthrights. One of the prerogatives of the reigning king was to choose the heir to the throne and to settle his successor (Mondjannagni 1977: 117; see also Ay 2). The palace was a place of formality. Life at the court was complex and full of intrigues and hatred among blood relatives.

The labour force was also highly organized in the kingdom. On the one hand, there were the free commoners **anatò**, the fathers from Nago. The king considered the commoners as his property; they were called **Fònnu**, ‘members of the **Fòn** ethnic group’. On the other hand, there were two distinct categories of labourers: the **kannumò**, ‘slaves’, and the **glési**, ‘hands of the field’, the serfs who were farm workers. Notice that both words show that labour was considered an occupation with very low esteem. Slaves were caught as war loot amongst neighbours, or they were bought from Hausa, Bariba or Nago traders (Garcia 1988: 31). Both men and women could become a slave to the king or they were sold to foreign traders. Some of them were sacrificed at the yearly ritual of the ‘Customs’. Slaves and their

⁶ A refers to Abomey; AC refers to the village of Abomey-Calavi; and Ay to Ayoy; see Abbreviations.

children remained property of the king. Serfs were men who sold themselves to work in the fields and to eat what the fields produced. Their children were free men and women. A number of stories of the corpus refer to the violent and oppressive living conditions of slaves and serfs (see A 1, AC 3, AC 6, AC 14).

The communication within the kingdom and with the outside world was maintained by means of **wensagun**, the king's messengers. They always had to travel in pairs to check each other in order to ensure the accurate repetition of the king's message. Their heads were half-shaven, and they were eunuchs (Burton 1864: 117; Argyle 1966: 68). They travelled with the king's sceptre. These messengers are mentioned in a number of texts of the corpus (see Ay 1, AC 4, AC 9, AC 10).

1.3. The Fon traditional religion

In the rural areas of Benin, the **vodun** religion is part of the society; it has nothing to do with an individually cherished faith. Despite the French colonial rule since the conquest of the kingdom in 1894, the **vodun** religion is still the common religion in the seventies of the last century.

The **vodun** religion of the Fon people is primarily an affirmation of the existence of a supernatural world. It is grounded on a structured mythology and an extremely elaborate doctrine. It comprises a system of diverse procedures for being in communication with the after-world. (Kerchache & Delmas 1986). The religion is also a socially embedded belief system that consists of a vital set of subsets of all things created, including men, animals, plants, ancestors and gods (Agboton 1997: 61). The **vodun** religion of the Fon people has its roots in Western Nigeria and **Danxomè**. The pantheons of the Fon from Benin and those of the Yoruba from Nigeria have much in common. They worship some of the deities under a different name, but their attributes and rituals are rather similar⁷

The history of the Fon people regularly shows a change of pantheons, as Argyle amongst others described (Argyle 1966). The successive kings of **Danxomè** all made changes in the pantheon. The kings imposed their own gods over the peoples they conquered. Nonetheless, they were also careful to surround the royal throne with the gods of the defeated local populations. The pantheon was extended with each conquest of a neighbour's territory. The idea was that the incorporation of new gods in the existing pantheon would mollify their mood towards the conquerors. However, a god that became too popular was also a good reason to adjust the pantheon (Augé 1988: 17ff.). These changes entail the co-existence of several distinct pantheons. Maupoil provided us with an extensive description of the Fongbe

⁷ The Yoruba deities are still venerated in Haiti.

religious pantheons and the role of divination (Maupoil 1988). He conducted his research mainly in Abomey, the former capital of the Kingdom in the thirties of the last century.

I will describe two dominant pantheons that also figure in the corpus. The first pantheon is the pantheon of the elusive deities as the Moon goddess **Mǎwù**, the West, and her counterpart, the Sun god **Lisà**, the East. Minor gods or **vodun** are surrounding **Mǎwù** and **Lisà**. All gods are two of a pair to ensure the balance of countervailing power. Each acquires its significance from being the opposite of the other. The **Mǎwù-Lisà** pantheon has a linguist, their youngest son **Lěgbà**. He speaks all the languages, those of the gods and those of the human beings whose markets he protects. **Lěgbà** is the messenger between **Mǎwù** and all the **vodun** ‘gods’, as well as between the human beings and the **vodun**. **Lěgbà** himself has a dual personality, for he is also the troublemaker, the god of disorder, quarrels and accidents (De Souza 1975: 53ff., Maupoil 1988: 352).⁸

The pantheon of **Sakpata** is the second pantheon that I will describe. He is the god of the earth and the water; his twin **Xeviosù** is the god of the sky and the fire. The Fon people consider the firstborn of twins as the spy who is ordered to go ahead by his twin brother. Hence, they consider lastborn **Sakpata** the ‘elder’ twin, which is the most important one. His firstborn brother **Xeviosù** is considered the lesser of the twins. This brings about that **Xeviosù** is jealous of **Sakpata**. Like each pantheon, the **Sakpata** pantheon has a number of ‘adjunct’ gods. These gods are always paired. **Mǎwù**, who is the prehistoric deity in this pantheon, gave the control of the rain to **Sakpata**. She fears that the god of the sky may abuse his power and will burn life on earth. **Sakpata** is often represented as a hermaphrodite; he is as well a man as a woman. His tasks are also twofold: he gives fertility and protects life on earth, but he inflicts smallpox as well. The pantheon changed over the centuries, but the intrigues remained part of it.⁹

The **vodun** are the intermediate gods that go between human beings and the goddess **Mǎwù**. The Fon people consider the **vodun** ‘gods’ as spirits that gave many gifts to humanity. **Vodun** are also called fetish: “Les divinités des nègres avaient été baptisées du nom de ‘fétiche’ d’après le mot portugais *fêitiço*” (Verger 1957: 27). This translation is inappropriate according to Beninese authors (Mondjannagni

⁸ Actually, the Fon gods are the mirror image of the Yoruba gods in the sense that the East in the Yoruba cult is the West in the Fon cult. The Yoruba god Moon is the East, and the god Sun is the West. The Yoruba influence is visible in the habits and language of the village of Ayou that is near the Yoruba region; see for example p. 56. Roman Catholic Fon people identify the Moon god with God, and the Sun god with Christ.

⁹ Herskovits considered the twin gods as the eldest sons of the gods Moon and Sun (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 126ff.; Herskovits 1938, vol. 2: 132ff.)

1977: 119). The **vodun** are immaterial spirits that are intangible. ‘Fetishes’ are the sacred objects which embody the spirit or the force of the god. They are not the spirits itself. Fetishes are items as stones, plants, pieces of iron, anthropomorphic statues, wooden sticks and so forth. Foreigners offensively called these objects ‘gris-gris’, and associated them with witchcraft. Anthropomorphic statues of all sizes are called **bocyɔ**, ‘statuette’ or ‘talisman’.¹⁰ At the entrance to every village, **vodun** made of red clay are set up. They have cowry eyes and an erect penis, and represent the god **Lěgbà**. The dwelling is fenced with palm branches, objects topped with a small mound of sand and knotted grasses. These are clear signs that touching any of these objects will anger the **vodun** who were called upon. Indigenous artists who are highly respected, carve the **bocyɔ** statuettes. They use all kinds of material, wood, iron, cord, tissue and so on. They are sometimes quite elaborate pieces of art (Kerchache & Delmas 1986).

Neither **vodun** nor spirits are called by name. Only the name of the place where a spirit may stay is mentioned. An iroko tree for example does not impersonate a spirit, but a spirit can temporarily live in the iroko. This aspect is vital in understanding the stories of the corpus.

The cult of the **vodun** religion has three main aspects: the sacrifices to the gods by the individual villager, the divination and the rites. The priests who devote themselves to a **vodun** are called **vodunsi**, ‘wives of the **vodun**’, by the Fon people. The **vodun** gods are fear inspiring; they have to be pacified. Hence, human beings have duties and obligations to the **vodun**. Every villager has from time to time to sacrifice food to the deities and thus to show humility.¹¹

A second aspect of the cult is the **Fa** divination. The Fon people are still known to consult the diviner in order to solve a problem or to make a decision (Agboton 1997: 61ff.). The oracle **Fa** is the personification of destiny. Fon people believe that if anything bad happens to an individual, a **vodun** may be displeased. This **vodun** expresses his dismay to the **vodunsi** who consults the diviner **bokónɔ̃**. The diviner is capable of connecting to the supernatural world to consult the oracle **Fa** in order to get to know the help of **Sé**, the ‘guardian spirit’ of an individual person that symbolises the power of the supreme god **Măwù**. The divination is performed by casting nuts on a tray that is sometimes beautifully carved. **Fa** indicates the sacrifice or the prayer that the **vodun** requires. Maupoil described the sixteen symbols of **Fa** that together have 256 combinations of which each has its specific meaning (Maupoil 1988). Maupoil also described the devices and objects, the stories and taboos that coincide with the different symbols (see 5.5.). He also pointed out that the cult of **Fa** stems from the Yoruba cult of Ifa, from Ife in Nigeria (Maupoil

¹⁰ See AC 3.

¹¹ See AC 9.

1988). De Souza gave a graphical representation of the combinations (De Souza 1975: 95ff.).¹²

The religious rituals and ceremonies form a third aspect of the **vodun** cult. People felt that the distance between themselves and the deities was not fit to live with, and so the cult of the deified ancestors developed. As a result, the number of rituals and ceremonies increased to the veneration of the family ancestors **hěnnuvodun**, and the ancestors of the clan **akòvodun** (De Souza 1975: 22).

Ceremonies are the rituals that establish communication with a god who is incarnated in the possessed dancer. A messenger announces the ceremony by playing the iron Fon double gong. He gathers the villagers at a special place at the outskirts of the village where the ancestors' altars are kept. The priests who will conduct the ceremony follow behind the messenger, and sit down while waiting for the audience to be seated. The audience sits on specially arranged chairs, benches and stools. Ceremonies may take several days, and often take place during the weekend, on for example two successive Saturdays. Ceremonies go with ritual sacrifices. The priests bleed the sacrificial kids and the priestesses offer the blood as a libation to the ancestors' altars (see 3.5.).

The **vodun** religion and its rituals that are closely related to the stories in the corpus were inhibited in 1975. In 1976, I often wondered whether the storytelling would survive, in view of the vigorous efforts of the government to wipe out traditional religion.

The religious pantheons of West Africa were exported together with the slaves to Brazil and Cuba or Haiti in the Caribbean. There the religion evolved into new forms that we also know as **voodoo**. However, in 1976 the pantheons of the Fon people from Benin differed widely from those in Brazil or Haiti. In these countries, the original pantheons mixed up with Christian symbols, as I noticed during my stay in Cap-Haïtien and Port-au-Prince (Haiti) in 1978 and 1979.

In 1992, twenty years after the coup by Kérékou and 17 years after the prohibition of the **vodun** religion, a new government of Benin reinstated the indigenous religion. However, the gods that occur in the stories of the corpus were not openly worshipped any more, and their names appeared to be forgotten. A new pantheon was imported from Haiti. In Ouidah, which is nowadays the centre of the traditional **vodun** religion, people worship Papa Dambala, Baron Samedi and Ezili Freda.

¹² Maupoil emphasized that the French translation of the word **boḵónḵ** 'diviner' as 'charlatan' was incorrect. In his eyes, a diviner is a respected priest and traditional doctor. On the other hand, Maupoil was worried about the attitude of the French administration before the Second World War towards divination. He feared that the negative views would cause the extinction of the knowledge of the diviners of both the pharmacopeia and of the ceremonies.

These gods are not the gods from the two main pantheons of the Kingdom of **Danxomè**. Neither of them has a Fon background. On the contrary, Baron Samedi comes from Haiti and the other two originate from Yoruba pantheons. The gods of the corpus appear to have been swept away by the time that passes and the men and woman who forget. However, it is impossible to grasp the meaning of the **hwènùxó** without some elementary knowledge and understanding of the **vodun** religion back in 1976.

1.4. An overview of publications on Fongbe grammar

With colonization, French became the official language. During this period, the French colonial administration was focused on assimilation, but the rate of illiteracy was still 90 %, even after independence in 1960 (Höftmann 1993: 17ff.). In the seventies of the last century the Gbe languages were spoken by 60 % of the inhabitants; 30 % of them were Fongbe native speakers. This relative high number of Fongbe speakers was a consequence of the developments in the past. As a result of the growth of the territory, Fongbe became the dominant language in the region (Höftmann 1993: 18).

The French colonial policy attempted to deny the indigenous languages and prohibited their use in official communication. Soon after its coup in 1972, the Kérékou administration initiated the policy of studying and teaching local languages (Höftmann 1993: 17). The administration installed the National Language Commission (CNL) that started the promotion of literacy with enthusiasm.

Despite the colonial language policy, Roman Catholic missionaries studied the Fongbe language throughout the 20th century. Father Superior Joulord published the first Fongbe vocabulary as early as 1907 (Joulord 1907). It consisted of 38 pages. After the end of the Second World War, French missionaries started to study Fongbe systematically. They published the majority of their studies in Cotonou. All publications were reneotyped, and probably duplicated in a limited number of copies.

The Fongbe-French dictionary by Segurola was the first methodical Fongbe dictionary that appeared. He began his studies in 1948 to publish the dictionary in 1963 (Segurola 1968). The dictionary consists of 640 pages and mentions the vocabulary of Joulord as its roots.¹³

Dujarier published a series of conversational and phrase books in Ouidah (Dujarier 1967). The books intend to teach Fongbe conversation to French expatriates. They

¹³ This section deals only with Fongbe grammars in general. I will not discuss descriptions of specific parts.

are practical ‘how to speak Fongbe’-guides, that consist of drills in daily situations in various contexts. The author adds a number of remarks to each drill: he discusses the differences in tone and meaning, and quotes proverbs. The spelling in this publication is a personal spelling that, for example, uses a tilde to indicate nasal vowels.

Guillet gets the credit for being the author of the first Fongbe grammar. He published a manual on Fongbe grammar and tonality: ‘Initiation à la tonalité et à la grammaire de la langue Fon’ (Guillet 1973 a). Preparatory studies and research took place at the monastery of the Benedictines at Toffo in July 1972. This manual is the first systematic description of the grammar and the tonal system of Fongbe. The manual consists of 17 lessons, and 21 conversation drills. Guillet advises his students to train the drills with the help of a native Fongbe speaker. The lessons show a deliberately designed method that starts each lesson with about a dozen drawings of objects (nouns) and actions (verbs), and a vocabulary of Fongbe words. The lesson then explains the images in a question-and-answer-drill that offers an extensive variety of clauses, and often covers as much as four pages. The third and last part of the lesson describes and discusses the grammatical and tonal rules of that lesson. The authors rigorously keep on this combination of dialogues and drills throughout the manual. In about the same period the co-authors Guillet and Dujarier completed the Fongbe grammar by publishing a supplementary part: ‘Eléments de grammaire Fon’ (Guillet and Dujarier 1973). This book combined several papers that they had previously individually published. The manual and the book together provide us with the first systematic description of Fongbe grammar. Guillet sees mostly to the functional categories, and Dujarier deals with the lexical categories. The supplementary grammar refers to the recently published manual; and although the cover of the manual writes 1972, Guillet ended his preface of the manual with the date of July 12, 1973. I therefore think that both works appeared in 1973.

Later that year Guillet published a phrase book that consists of 30 texts, both conversations and stories (Guillet 1973 b). He presented the phrase book as a follow-up to his manual. The language consultants who wrote the texts come from different places, Gbegnonvi came from Ouidah, Koi was from Torri-Bossito and Adamaho came from Toffo. The phrase book uses the official Fongbe spelling that the National Language Commission introduced in 1973. Therefore the publishing date must be estimated late 1973.¹⁴

¹⁴ The publications before 1973 use the spelling that Segurola introduced (Segurola 1968). The National Language Commission introduced the new Fongbe spelling in 1973 (Tokoudagba 1973, Hounyème 1973). This spelling becomes the official spelling in 1975 (Decret du Gouvernement. 75-272 of October 24 1975 CNDL).

Another roneotyped publication named ‘*Éléments de recherche sur la langue Fon*’ appeared in 1982. The cover mentions no author. The publication is referred to as Anonymous 1982. The first page shows two handwritten remarks. The paper was published in Cotonou, whereafter somebody added the name of the country: Benin. The letters ‘s.n.’ meaning ‘sans nom’ or ‘anonymous’ were handwritten behind the year of publication. Actually, the book is an abbreviated and stripped version of the manual of Fongbe grammar by Guillet, and the supplementary grammar by Guillet and Dujarier (Guillet 1973 a; Guillet and Dujarier 1973). The book neither does mention the original authors, nor is it a complete copy of its predecessors. Actually, the anonymous version of Fongbe grammar omits several descriptions and their examples as well as the argumentation that supports the explanations. Anonymous refers to the DAPR-leaflets **Nukplɔnwéma Fɔngbeme tɔn**, meaning ‘Learner’s book of Fongbe’, edited by Tokoudagba of the CNDL, the Dahomean Language Commission (Tokoudagba 1975). Anonymous uses the official spelling of 1975 to publish his copy of the works of Guillet and Dujarier.¹⁵

Höftmann published a Fongbe grammar in German twenty years after Guillet (Höftmann 1993). The ‘*Grammatik des Fɔn*’ describes the urban variant of Fongbe, the language that people speak in Cotonou and its vicinities. This publication also includes the Abomey variant, which is the origin of Fongbe. The grammar has three parts: phonology, morphology and syntax (Höftmann 1993: 19). Höftmann gathered the texts in this grammar in the years 1973 to 1979 with the support of the National Language Commission. She reports the changes in language policy of the revolutionary administration. The grammar refers to the works by Guillet and Dujarier that she apparently consulted. Rassinoux published a dictionary Fon-Français and a dictionary Français-Fon in 2000. Both dictionaries are based on the work of Segurola (Segurola and Rassinoux 2000; Rassinoux 2000). Several years later, Höftmann published a dictionary Fon-Français and a dictionary Français-Fon (Höftmann 2003).

Lefebvre and Brousseau published an integral ‘Grammar of Fongbe’ that provides us with many details (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002). The grammar describes the phonology, the functional categories and the interactions between them, as well as the major lexical categories and major syntactic constructions. Lefebvre leans heavily on Anonymous, specifically when it comes to examples and analyses (Anonymous 1982). In consequence, the ‘Grammar of Fongbe’ misses the arguments proposed by Guillet and Dujarier in ‘*Éléments de grammaire Fongbe*’, though Lefebvre remarked the following: “Similar facts are also noted in Guillet and Dujarier (1973) and Agbidinokoun (1991: 233)” (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 48). This quotation is puzzling indeed, especially when one considers Höftmann’s

¹⁵ The editor Julien Tokoudagba offered me the DAPR-leaflets in 1976. The book appeared in 1975; it has 36 pages.

acknowledgement of the work of Guillet and Dujarier in the grammar that appeared nine years earlier.¹⁶ Actually, the grammar by Guillet and Dujarier gives a much better insight into a number of grammatical issues that I encountered in the corpus than the grammar of Lefebvre and Brousseau does.

Guillet and Dujarier describe a number of features of language use that occur also in the narrative discourse of the corpus (see part 4 Style). The grammars by Höftmann and Lefebvre pay little attention to these features. These grammars were published many years after I collected the corpus. Either speech in the rural areas differs from urban Fongbe, or narrative discourse uses specific functions and rules. A third possibility is that these features disappeared from present-day Fongbe with regard to the grammar by Lefebvre. Conclusively, I consider the grammars by Guillet and Dujarier as an important reference mark.

1.5. Earlier publications about Fongbe and related verbal art

The first part of this section deals with publications on the verbal art of the Fon of Benin. All of these studies are older than the recording of the corpus in 1976, although some of them were published or republished after 1976. The second section gives a brief overview of publications about verbal art in the neighbouring Ewegbe territory in Togo and Ghana.

Publications about Fongbe verbal art

When France finally succeeded in the conquest of the colony that they called French Equatorial Africa, the republic sent, on a regular basis, the so-called colonial functionaries to investigate the peoples and the territory. The French administration aimed at an extensive and systematic description of the ethnographic background of the peoples in their colonies. The colonial administrator Le Hérisse wrote a concise history that covers the reigns of the eleven kings of **Danxomè** ‘Histoire du Dahomey racontée par un indigène’ (Le Hérisse 1911: 271-352). His publication also contains eleven stories and songs. His colleague Maupoil worked in the area from 1934 to 1936. He described the divination and the diviner’s practices and the meaning of **Fa**, ‘the spirit of divination’ in the thirties of the last century (Maupoil

¹⁶ The quote refers to a minor detail; one may place the possession marker **sín** after a noun, but one may also omit the marker. This omission often happens in Fongbe: one conveys the origin or the genitive function by a noun phrase that consists of two nominal constituents of which the last one is the genitive of the first one. Lefebvre also referred to Guillet and Dujarier in the introduction (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 9). It is highly probable that the quote refers to the publication by Agbidinokoun.

1988, and see also 5.5.). Maupoil also provided us with a collection of 73 stories about **Fa** that he qualified as legends (see 5.5.). Both publications contain stories and characters that are similar to the corpus.

The American anthropologist Herskovits came to the former Kingdom of **Danxomè** in 1931 to study the roots of the New World after he accomplished a fieldwork in Surinam in 1928 and 1929 (Herskovits 1938; Herskovits and Herskovits 1970). Herskovits aimed to find the evidence of the legacy of African culture in the Afro-American cultures and intended to compare the New World Culture of North and South America to the Old World Culture, which was in his approach the culture of Africa, Europe and Asia. Herskovits looked for similarities. He took it for granted that the stories travelled from West Africa to Surinam. His main objective was to prove that Surinam people have their roots in the Ashanti kingdom in Ghana, but also in the kingdom of **Danxomè**. He stated that the Fon people came second as influential resource (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 4, 8). The Herskovitses' fieldwork brought them to Abomey, Allada and Ouidah. The choice for Ouidah is still questionable, if only because the Brazilian influence from the then recently re-immigrated slaves was still very strong at that time (Verger 1968). Herskovits aimed at making a classification that compared his collection of Surinam stories to his new collection of Dahomean stories. Therefore, he classified the material in a way that would facilitate the comparative and cross-cultural analysis (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 26).

Herskovits distinguished two main categories: the 'hwenoho', the myths, and the 'heho', the non-religious tales. He also marked out subclasses for both categories. The 'hwenoho', the myths, comprise stories of the gods. They consist also of clan myth-chronicles that tell the origin of the clans, including explanations of ritual behaviour, food taboos, and the ancestral code. These clan myths use supernatural beings or animals that talk like human beings as a metaphorical device to establish a setting of ancient times (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 20). The 'heho', the non-religious tales, have the following seven subclasses: divination stories, hunter stories, 'Enfant Terrible' stories (twins, orphans, children born to die, or abnormally born), the humorous Yo stories, tales of women (love, intrigue and betrayal), explanatory and moralizing tales, transformation tales and other miscellaneous. Herskovits observed that these stories start with for example "This is about Hunter" or "This is about Orphan" (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 23). He added that "the opening sets the stage by naming the characters, and the tasks before them; but the end, whether as moral or explanation, describes the tale." (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 24).

Unfortunately, the Herskovitses' work has many lapses. Maupoil arrived in the area when Herskovits published the first articles on his fieldwork. Maupoil often expressed his doubts about the observations and statements of Herskovits. Maupoil

mentioned that his doubts even increased when he was unable to get confirmation of the statements, although he put a lot of effort into checking the observations of Herskovits with his own consultants (Maupoil 1988). One of the mitigating factors of the number of lapses is the circumstance that the communication between Herskovits and his consultants and vice versa must have been difficult: they did not speak each other's language. Herskovits himself admitted that he did not speak French, and that he had not even tried to master Fongbe, that he estimated far too difficult to learn. On the other hand, the language consultants spoke Fongbe and some French, but they hardly spoke English. It is obvious that total confusion is unavoidable when partners hardly speak each other's language. The language confusion shows for example in a story that mentions the friendship between a cat and a dog (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 225-227). This is odd, for the Fon consider the cat and the duck as true friends who share wisdom and discretion (AC 6). There is little doubt that an indistinct pronunciation led to the misunderstanding of dog instead of duck. Moreover, it is hitherto unthought-of that the wise cat would be friends with the aggressive and talkative dog who is the symbol of **Lègbà** (see also 5.5. Religious devices).

During the storytelling, Frances Herskovits typed the renderings of the stories. Actually, the book shows that these renderings are summaries that do not have the typical repetitions or recurrent variations that Fongbe performers favour. Therefore, it is hardly possible to compare these stories with the ones in publications by other authors. However, Herskovits conveys his fascination by giving the following advice at the end of the introduction: "As spoken forms, the stories should preferably be read aloud." (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 122).

The publications by the Herskovitses are much cited, especially in English publications. On the other hand, the results of his research are not in line with the publications by French and Beninese authors. His lack of knowledge of Fongbe and of French is certainly one of the reasons for some of his deviant interpretations.

Argyle wrote a survey of the available publications about the Fon of **Danxomè** (Argyle 1966). He vigorously criticized the Herskovitses' publications for their shallowness. In view of the vast number of data and studies about **Danxomè**, Argyle doubted that the statements and arguments by Herskovits were valid. He frequently quotes Herskovits, though he often adds a sceptical comment to these quotes. He underlines the lack of observation of the descriptions, when he mentions for example the statement of Herskovits that the Kings of **Danxomè** never killed a captured king. This statement is contradictory to the descriptions by a number of authors who affirmed that captured kings were killed at the yearly 'Customs' in Abomey. Early European travellers such as Norris, Forbes and Burton reported on the kingdom (Norris 1789; Forbes 1851; Burton 1864). All of them mentioned that the skulls of captured kings were carefully preserved for exhibition on special

occasions. Verger confirmed this as a fact in his publication on slave trade (Verger 1968). Actually, the proof is in the preserving of the skulls of captured kings. The compound of the royal palaces in Abomey is a museum nowadays. It exhibits a 19th century throne that rests on the skulls of captured Yoruba chiefs. The *Musée du Quai Branly* shows a similar throne in Paris, France (Herskovits 1938, vol. 2: 98; Argyle 1966: 85). Argyle is not alone in being critical of the publications of Herskovits. Many years later, Babalola Yai endorses Argyle's views (Babalola Yai 1999).

Besides the publications of ethnographical investigations by the French administrators, indigenous publications appeared as well in Cotonou (Quenum 1938). The Dahomean ethnographic magazine 'Les Etudes Dahoméennes' had its head office in Cotonou and published articles and indigenous stories (Etudes Dahoméennes 1955, 1956, 1967, 1968).

The Beninese author Guédou provides us with a substantial description of the Fongbe concepts **xó**, 'speech', 'discourse' and **gbè**, 'voice', 'language' (Guédou 1985). He did the research in the town of Abomey. His study investigated the 'Fongbe social speech' meaning the oral literature and language. The analysis shows that the social speech elaborately refers to the relation between a person and his speech. Social speech depends on the social event, and even fits into the event. The ownership of **xó** is considered to belong to the society that speaks the language **gbè**. Fongbe verbal art stems from the society as a whole system (Guédou 1985: 406). However, the style of the performance or the ritual effectiveness belongs to the individual storyteller (Guédou 1985: 406ff.). Guédou considers the genre **hwènùxó** the words of the elders. He defines the genre as long educational stories that give advice for life. He considers **hwènùxó** the narrative of an event in the past that includes all narratives about characters, places and moments. Guédou affirms that **hwènùxó** comprises also a number of subgenres that need further examination, although he provides us with a provisional classification of the subgenres (Guédou 1985: 450ff.). He describes the following subgenres amongst others: there is the long **hwènùxó** that is a story about human characters and their misbehaviour and the **yèxó** 'words of **yè**', 'shadow' or 'double' which are stories about beings that do not exist, and that never existed. The main feature of these stories is that they have no human characters (Guédou 1985: 409). A third subgenre is the **xèxó**, 'the words of the birds'; these are fables about animals. The description of the **yèxó** is ambiguous. It is correct that the Fongbe **yè** has the meaning of 'spirit' or 'double' in a religious way of speaking. One of the agents in the corpus is called **Yèye**, meaning 'the double spirit' or 'the Spirit Man', who is the hunter, and who is the counterpart agent of the king (AC 10). Unfortunately, Guédou does not provide us with an explanation of **Yègbó**, 'the trickster', who is also called **Yè**. Here is a double indeed. The trickster who is called **Yègbó** becomes **Yè** either when he leaves the earth for

the House of Rain in the Land of Blue Sky, or for the Ancestor's Market. I will discuss this later when I describe the properties and surnames of the trickster (see also 5.2.3., and 6.5.).

Unfortunately, the transcriptions of the corpora of Fongbe stories that I discussed in this section are not publicly available. Therefore, it is not easy to compare the language of these publications to the language of my stories. However, I can compare the elements and properties that occur in the stories.

Publications about Ewegbe stories

When discussing the stories of the corpus, I will refer to two publications about storytelling in Togo, a country that has a common border with the West of Benin. Along the coast and inwards Togo and Ghana, people speak **Ewegbe** which like Fongbe is also a Gbe language that belongs to the Kwa family (Williamson and Blench 2000). Both languages and cultural heritages bear a resemblance.

Verdier published a corpus that consists of one thousand 1382 stories in the various languages of Togo (Verdier 1971). His book gives an overview of the specific universe of the stories that is populated by gods, humans and animals. The stories in his corpus are educational according to Verdier. His approach is quite the contrary to the neat description of the Fongbe genres by Guédou. Verdier admitted that he found it hard to classify his corpus that he reluctantly described in terms of European genres. (Verdier 1971 vol.1: 376, 382).

The second publication is by Konrad who collected 400 **Ewegbe** stories in southern Togo and Ghana, performed by men and women (Konrad 1985). The book gives a description and analysis of comic stories about the **Ewegbe** trickster, and contains thirty comic stories. The description also includes the nonverbal aspects of the performance. The storytellers of this corpus were predominantly men. Konrad mentions that women storytellers kept a low profile in the following quote:

Women are tended to be more reserved and therefore, contact with them was more difficult. Once they came forth and proper introductions were made, women proved to be very adept storytellers, although stylistically different from men. While men tended to be more animated, and told, in many cases, raucously wild and bawdy tales, women were more subdued and deliberate in their telling. (Konrad 1994: 3).

The most popular verbal art among the Ewe is the **gli**, the plural being **gliwo**, that is the imaginative oral narrative. The Ewe trickster is **Yiyi**, the small spider who has a round belly, and who speaks very rapidly with a nasal voice. The main topics of the trickster stories are deceit and deception. The primary function of trickster stories is

to entertain, but they still have an educational function. The stories recite how the trickster is punished, and how he exceptionally is rewarded with booty and trophies that he obtained by deceit. Konrad's analysis shows that trickster stories have the following three key aspects: they are comic stories, they are performed narratives, and they convey cultural values and beliefs. Konrad emphasizes that the **gliwo** have no script, and that the stories have no fixed form. Quite the contrary, the structure of each story is unique, and depends on the mood of the performer who chooses the specific performance. The form of the stories strictly depends on the oral character. Konrad calls the stories 'impromptu renderings'. Stories are improvisations around the plots and images that are familiar to the **Ewegbe** audience. The accomplished performers use repetitive patterns between the peak and the denouement. Verbal and non-verbal aspects are an important part of this culture where the literacy rate is relatively low.

1.6. Concepts and approaches

In this section, I will discuss several concepts and approaches that, in my view, are helpful to elucidate the features of the Fongbe performance. First, I will explain why I perceive the performance as a speech act in the sense that the performance is a set of utterances that provokes a social action. Afterwards, I will discuss two concepts that are appropriate to describe the features of the performance. I will start with the ethnopoetics approach and continue with the semiotic approach. These concepts have a similar background, and complement one another. Finally, I will introduce the mental usage of the storyboard.

The performance is one of the main features of Fongbe storytelling. The performer holds the floor, and fascinates the audience by delivering a vivacious flow of images and feelings. Performers literally stage their story and prevent the audience from pondering on a specific part. Actually, the performance is a special form of art that is hard to capture, because it has its own specifications.

In general, the majority of concepts in discourse studies are designed to understand a specific type of literature. These concepts for example describe the plots and protagonists of stories as if they were about people in real life who are recognisable characters. A survey of discourse studies shows that a description of universal functions is not quite satisfactory, for it only accounts for Eurocentric and Western features. The authors often neglect the occurrence of specific or cultural features that have locally driven patterns. This calls to mind the idea of linguistic relativity, also known as the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis', which considers that the fundamental categories of thought, such as time and space, differ from language to language. The hypothesis concerns the influence of the cultural context or the worldview that leads

to a specific way of speaking. “Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know.” (Sapir 1921: 220).

Gumperz and Levinson re-examined linguistic relativity, “the idea that culture, *through* language affects the way we think, especially perhaps our classification of the experienced world.” (Gumperz and Levinson 1996, I: 8; italics in the original). The authors of this interdisciplinary book explore the evidence that different languages code the world with distinct semantic concepts. They show that these concepts influence cognitive processes, and require a wider definition of meaning that incorporates contextual influences on interpretation.¹⁷

One of the most remarkable features of the performance of Fongbe storytelling is the prosody that alternates utterances with silence. Austin’s concept of ‘speech act’ seems the appropriate approach to analyse the utterances of the performance: “What we have to study is not the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation.” (Austin 1962: 138). Austin makes a distinction between two types of speech acts: the illocutionary and the perlocutionary acts. He defined statements and promises as illocutionary acts. Perlocutionary acts involve achieving specific effects on hearers such as convincing and amusing. The Fongbe performance is a perlocutionary speech act that requests the audience to act. Austin also defined the speech act as a number of utterances that do not necessarily coincide with clauses. Both notions are crucial to understand the performance of the corpus.

Two more concepts are underlying the analysis of the performance of the corpus. In the sixties of the last century, two distinct groups of academics took interest in narrative discourse. Both concepts are close, for they take root in the publications of the pre-war Prague School, especially in the publications about functions in stylistics and poetics by Jakobson and Mukřarovsky (Jakobson 1960; Mukřarovsky 1970). Features of description are the specific social situation of speech, and the language usage and the underlying codes in terms of the context of the culture of a society.

In the United States of America, a group of anthropological linguists aspire to analyse the ‘mode of speaking’ and the ‘way of living’ and to describe a framework of the ethnography of speaking. I will particularly consider the work of Bauman whose ethnopoetic approach is performance-centred. In France, several scholars of different disciplines aimed at analysing the cultural codes of a message and therewith at designing a semiotic framework. They have become known as the French Structuralists. I will particularly pay attention to the ideas of the semioticians Barthes and Greimas.

¹⁷ The issue is not to rethink linguistic determinism, but to reconsider perception and meaning, such as, for example, the description of cultural variations in thought processes by Cole and Scribner (Cole and Scribner 1974).

Ethnopoetics: a performance-centred approach

The American anthropological linguists were influenced by the linguistic functionalism of the pre-war Prague School and the linguist Jakobson, as well as by the works of the anthropologist Boas and the linguist Sapir. They aimed at formulating a descriptive framework of ‘the ethnography of speaking’. The ethnography of speaking should describe the patterns of language use as a cultural system in a particular society (Bauman and Sherzer 1974: 7). The exploration involved the linking of the verbal aspects to the sociocultural aspects in the conduct of speaking. The framework of ‘the ethnography of speaking’ is also known as ‘the ethnography of communication’. The term was called into being by Hymes (Gumperz and Hymes 1972). Hymes considered that rules of speaking are “the ways in which speakers associate particular modes of speaking, topics or message forms, with particular settings and activities” (Gumperz and Hymes 1972: 36). In his view, both the speech event and the speech act are the basic unit for the verbal interaction in speech communities.

Bauman noted that the term performance conveys the dual sense of artistic ‘action’ and artistic ‘event’ (Bauman 1974: 290). His approach of verbal art is clearly performance-centred: “Performance is a mode of language use, a way of speaking” (Bauman 1978: 11). He aimed at explaining the patterning of culture, which is the orientation of individuals to participate in several and overlapping speech communities (Bauman and Sherzer 1974: 16). In his view, the performance of individual performers is a ‘mode of speaking’, and a ‘way of living’.

Bauman’s descriptions of performance as socially appropriate are very close to the way I would describe the lively sessions that I attended during the recording of the corpus. Henceforth his argument that the terms oral tradition or oral literature are hardly justified is powerful. Actually, these terms only take into account the society ownership of the stories, and neglect the creativity of the individual artist. Bauman’s approach emphasized that “the patterning of language goes far beyond laws of grammar to comprehend the use of language in social life” (Bauman and Sherzer 1974: 6). He introduced the notion of ‘framing’ to describe the ‘interpretative frame’, which cues an audience about what to expect from a verbal performance, which is to follow (Bauman 1974: 292). He also made clear that the description of performance should pay attention to the usage of communicative means such as formulae, codes and parallelism (Bauman 1978: 16).

“The essential task in the ethnography of performance is to determine the *culture-specific constellations of communicative means that serve to key performance in particular communities*” (Bauman 1978: 22; italics in the original). Bauman affirms Jakobson’s view, that narratives are keyed both to the events in which they are told and to the events that they recount (Bauman 1986: 2; Jakobson 1971). Bauman

considers the way in which performance is keyed as a signal for a particular act of expression. He notes that communicative means are embodied in particular genres of a culture that show conventionalized utterance types that incorporate the features of the performance (Bauman 1978: 25).

The semiotic approach: cultural codes and functions

The approach of the French Structuralists emanates from the studies of the Russian Formalists, from the ideas that Saussure developed in the field of linguistics (Saussure 1972), the theories of the pre-war Prague School, including Jakobson, as well as the anthropological studies of Lévi-Strauss.¹⁸

The Structuralists published their articles and studies in specialized magazines, which appeared later in a single volume per author. Each author used his own concepts and nomenclature. The most important publication was the magazine 'Communications' that was published by the prestigious 'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes' (EPHE), part of Sorbonne University in Paris. One of the leading figures was Roland Barthes who was research fellow at the 'Centre d'Etudes des Communications de Masse' at EPHE. His predecessors at EPHE were amongst others Benveniste, Saussure and Lévi-Strauss. Under the leadership of Jakobson, they founded together with Greimas the 'Cercle parisien de sémiotique', the Parisian Semiotics Society, in 1967 (Floch 1990: 7). This research centre for mass communication considered culture as a set of myths, a specific language or jargon (Barthes 1970: 10).

Barthes described the individual patterns in writing and the underlying cultural codes (Barthes 1966). He aimed at getting insight in a universal system of signification that is part of the binary distinction of 'Langue – Parole' by Saussure (Barthes 1964: 98-102). Barthes' approach also stems from the ideas of Hjelmslev who distinguished the 'denotation' or 'basic meaning' from the 'connotation' or 'contextual meaning' (Hjelmslev 1969). This point of view comes close to the core idea of linguistic relativity that culture, through language, affects the way we think (see p. 32).

Barthes demystified the myths of French daily life in a number of essays in which he analysed the cultural illusions on which the French feed, for example in the field of fashion, food, the automotive industry and movable property. He describes the cultural framework and its terms of reference. In his view, the cultural system of

¹⁸ Lévi-Strauss coined the word 'structuralism'. The French Structuralists often use the term 'recherches sémiologiques' when they refer to a semiotic framework. The term semiology originates from Saussure who did not elaborate the concept. Culler gave a survey of Structuralists poetics (1986).

meaning consists of the codes that people take for granted. However, codes are far from being natural; on the contrary, they are produced from the socially conventional and moral fabric (Barthes 1970: 9). Barthes shows in his analyses, that history and culture bring these codes about. The underlying codes play a key role in the meaning of language (Barthes 1964: 18).

Barthes blamed his fellow literary analysts for being Utopian. In his view, they favoured the inductive method as a start-up to describe a genre, era or society, but at the same time, they distorted the outcome by anticipating the framework of a universal model. He subtly argued, that the linguistic colleagues preferred the deductive method, although they had to account for 3000 languages. In his own words:

“Que dire alors de l’analyse narrative, placée devant des millions de récits? Elle est par force condamnée à une procédure déductive;”(Barthes 1966: 2).

One of the articles by Barthes constitutes a particular meaningful approach to the analysis of the corpus (Barthes 1966). The article discusses the necessity to design a structural analysis of narrative discourse, and opens with the following sentence: “Innombrables sont les récits du monde”, meaning ‘the number of narrative texts around is huge’ (Barthes 1966: 1). Barthes explains that this sentence reflects his perception of the variety of genres, that is the narrative discourse whether oral or written, the narrative pictures that are fixed photos or mobile movies, and the narrative gestures, but also the mix of all these substances.

The Structuralists aimed at the design of a semiotic framework that systematically described the “lisibilité”, meaning the ‘understandability’ of a message (Greimas 1966 (a): 28). Structuralism emphasizes the role of the reader instead of the one of the author. The basic idea of the concept of understanding is that the message conveys a code that the receiver of the message recognizes and interprets. The semiotic framework of narrative discourse must distinguish three levels of description: the level of ‘functions’, the level of ‘actions’, and the level of the ‘plot’ or intrigue self. The level of ‘functions’ indicates the sequences of actions and events (Propp 1958; Bremond 1968). Bremond adopted Propp’s concept of function as the basic unit of a narrative, though he rejected Propp’s idea of the obligatory order of the successive functions. Greimas elaborated the level of ‘actions’. He considered characters as the ‘actants’ who are the operators of the message that is encoded in a binary opposition of actions and counteractions (Greimas 1966 (b): 172ff.; see also 5.3.). The level of the ‘plot’ distinguishes the ‘real’ history of a story from the plot that the writer uses to tell the story (see chapter 17). The distinction originates from

the Russian Formalists, but the theoretical elaboration dates from the sixties, and involves both Eco and Todorov (Eco 1966; Todorov 1966).¹⁹

The storyboard metaphor

In view of the emphasis that the majority of European-based analyses and models put on the reading of written texts to understand their meaning, it is remarkable that the Structuralists followed their ambition to initiate applied research. In the sixties of the last century, Greimas took the initiative to found the ‘Groupe de Recherches Sémio-Linguistiques’, whereupon the INSEAD (Institut Européen d’Administration des Affaires) Business School in Fontainebleau realized the importance of the contribution of this research for their teaching programme. INSEAD (www.insead.edu) used the results to teach its students the strategic basics of marketing. From then on, the studies of Barthes, Greimas and Eco were widely brought into use in the field of consumer advertising, marketing communication and mass communication in Europe. These studies influenced the advertising industry that, from then on, considered a commercial as a story.

I think that it is wise to step over the limits of discourse studies to broaden one’s horizon to the field of pictorial art and movie pictures. This is why I will refer to the storyboard technique to explain how the performers of the corpus create the configuration of the performance. A storyboard is like the first version of a film script. It consists of a set of panels that depict the successive stages of the story. Of course, in storytelling the technique of the storyboard is a mental process and not a physical exercise with real panels with instructions and pictures. Nevertheless, the storyboard technique is the key to the Fongbe performance and its communicative configuration.²⁰

I will use an ethnopoetic approach as well as a semiotic approach to describe and to analyse the performance and the discourse of the stories in the corpus. It is obvious that both approaches are necessary to understand the performance, the content and the way that the performers stage the plot. Both provide us with tools that are helpful to describe verbal art. The semiotician Barthes pleads to use deduction to describe the codes and terms of reference in stories. Bauman’s approach focuses on the

¹⁹ American academics often call the French structuralism ‘Post-structuralism’, probably taking seriously the critical hints about the flirtation of several French academics with unconventional philosophies as nihilism or neo-Marxism in the sixties and the seventies of the last century.

²⁰ The storyboard technique comes from the early days of the film industry. It is used to create a story when there are still great degrees of freedom to develop the plot. It is nowadays widely used in the media industry.

description of frames and specific patterns in a speech community. The publications of both have in common that they aim at a systematic unravelling of the underlying codes and frames. There are also differences, though they are subtle. Structuralism studies the functions, actions and the plot of the story. On the other hand, the orientation on understanding allows me to describe the codes that both performer and audience understand. Ethnopoetics studies the mode of speaking, but is also performance-oriented which means that it focuses on the study of the event itself. Both approaches emphasize the communication of the message and the meaning of the message.

2. Collecting the corpus

This chapter describes the fieldwork during my stay in Benin. I will first describe the social context during the fieldwork and the political situation at the time. I will enter into the planning of the project and the preparations for the recording. The chapter continues with the actual collection of the corpus. Finally, I will describe the transcription and translation.

2.1. The social and political context of the fieldwork

The preparations and the recording of the corpus took place in 1975 and 1976. This section describes the traditional context in the rural communities in Benin at that time and the changes that the Marxist-Leninist revolution brought about.

The traditional context

In 1976, the economy of the rural areas in the south of Benin depended on the growing of crops of starchy staples like maize, peanuts, and plantain. Yam, cassava, and millet were brought in from the north of the country. People in the south grew all kinds of vegetables as well. Small husbandry was a common practice. People lived in dwellings where a number of families lived together. A village consisted of a number of larger and smaller compounds. The supply of electricity was exceptional, but oil lamps were common.

The chief of the village officially represented the central government, but in daily life, he shared his power with the priests and the diviners. In this way, power still had the characteristics of the former Kingdom of **Danxomè**. The power relations within the villages have been extensively described by Elwert-Kretschmer (Elwert-Kretschmer 1995).

The traditional religion and the practice of divination still played a crucial role in the life of the Fon people (Agboton 1997: 63). The many **vodun** and **vodunsi**, the priests and priestesses of the different gods, and the traditional chiefs and the **bokónò**, ‘diviners’, controlled the rural villages through the awe for gods and ancestors. They controlled the jurisdiction in the villages by ordering sanctions and by stipulating sacrifices. They alone decided the price that people had to pay to get protection against evil. Through this privilege, priests and diviners controlled the local economy and, which was even more important, their own income. They made huge profits through these usurious practices that prevented the efficient food production that a country requires for its stability. The French colonial rule and the post-colonial period did not change these deeply rooted habits. Libations and

sacrifices continued as usual to pacify the gods, in spite of the government's formal interdiction.

The south of Benin has two wet seasons, but the rainfall is structurally lower than in the neighbouring countries. In consequence, the shorter wet season often produces a very low yield or no yield at all. The rainfall has been systematically measured since 1921. The 'Projet d'Agro-Pédologie' of the UNDP analysed these data and produced maps and graphics of the rainfall data of Benin from 1921 until 1977. The performances were recorded in the wet season of 1976. Rainfall was reported low during that year and the villagers feared for their crops. The studies show exactly how little rain fell in 1976: the rain measurement was as low as 794,3 mm. The average rainfall is about 1200 mm/year (Aalders 1977 (a) and (b)). At the end of 1976, serious food shortages became apparent. The people in the rural areas believed that the gods showed their wrath, especially the god of fertility, the one whose name must not be spoken, the mighty **Sakpata**.

The political context

In early 1975 life seemed peaceful. Life was slowly getting worse in terms of scarcity. In mid June 1975, the atmosphere became very tense and a period of curfews followed. Military roadblocks were set up on a regular basis, and the borders of the country were often closed. On Sunday, October 26, 1975, President Mathieu Kérékou changed the country's name from Dahomey to Benin. Five weeks later, on Monday, December 1, President Kérékou made a broadcasted statement in which he gave the country Benin the epithet 'People's Republic'. Radio Cotonou was renamed 'La Voix de la Révolution', the 'Voice of the Revolution'. A new flag was launched: it was green with a red star in the left upper corner. The meaning was clear. The colour green symbolized agriculture and the red star expressed the Marxist-Leninist state system. All of a sudden, I lived in a People's Republic. I still lived in the same house, in the same district called Patte d'Oie, with the same people around me, though everything around had changed. '**E húzú, dandàn, e húzú, dandàn**, prêt pour la Révolution et la lutte continue!' became the common way to say 'Hello'.²¹

What happened before? Right from its start on November 26, 1972, the Kérékou government proclaimed the destruction of the old regime, the political structure and power of the politicians of the past. It also announced the reorganization of the economic, cultural and social structure in order to free the country from foreign domination, and to erase corruption, extortion and nepotism.

²¹ **E húzú, dandàn** means 'It obligatorily changes'.

On December 20, 1975, President Kérékou delivered a speech to conclude a conference of the supreme command, staff and executives inclusive. The title was clear: ‘Libérons-nous de l’état féodal’, meaning ‘Let us free ourselves from the feudal yoke’. The president aimed at the colonial and neo-colonial domination. It was clear that the president was serious about his aims because the conference took place in Abomey, once the capital of the Kingdom of **Danxomè**. The French colonial authorities had dethroned the king of Abomey. The president of Benin imposed his reforms right on the spot where the kings Guezo and Glele had assembled their thrones on the skulls of the defeated Yoruba kings. A more specific aspect of the president’s speech against feudalism was the suppression of the traditional religion and its social structures (Elwert-Kretschmer 1995: 104ff.).²² This was particularly relevant for my project of recording traditional stories in the rural areas.

The power of the religion and its diviners in the rural areas was still enormous in the seventies of the last century (De Souza 1975). Actually, the witch doctors and the diviners controlled the villages, for they controlled finance and loans. They determined the total sum of the sacrifices that were required to pacify the gods, and as a result, they had the villagers literally in their power (Elwert-Kretschmer 1995: 104). Feeling strongly supported by the elections that he won on November 18 1975, President Kérékou and his administration imposed a decree that stated that the **vodun** cults and the ‘scientific Marxist-Leninist state system’ were incompatible. The administration aimed at breaking down the traditions and the power of the chiefs, the ‘**vodun** priests’ and the traditional doctors in the rural communities in the south of Benin. The administration prohibited ceremonial burials and initiation ceremonies. In the eyes of the Kérékou administration, the feudal structure of the rural areas impaired agricultural production. The administration considered that a sufficient and efficient food production would increase the strength of the economy and the stability of the society. The government used coercion to dismantle the traditions, and through them the power and influence of chiefs and priests.

The ‘La Voix de la Révolution’ radio broadcast and the **Ehuzu** newspaper were widely accusing the traditional priests and priestesses of homicide or murder from the beginning of April 1976. **Ehuzu** was the official publication of the ONEPI (Office National d’Edition de Presse et d’Imprimerie) of the Interior Ministry and the Cotonou Parquet. On April 14, 1976, **Ehuzu** published a striking and outspoken article (Ehuzu 1976, April 14: 4). The article reported the war on sorcerers and their practices in the Oueme province, and had the following title: ‘La lutte anti-féodale

²² Elwert-Kretschmer thoroughly discussed the background of this fight that lasted from 1975 until 1989.

dans sa phase active’, meaning ‘The war against anti-feudalism really started’. Until then, the administration had been unable to deal a severe blow to the power of the priests, although it hoped to achieve a waning of prestige. The witch-hunt had started.

In a major interview, published in November 1976 by *Afrique-Asie*, President Kérékou mentioned “une vigoureuse campagne nationale contre les forces qui subjuguèrent la paysannerie. Elles ont pour noms les féodaux, avec leurs cortèges de malfaiteurs professionnels et des criminels sournois que nous nommons dans notre pays, les sorciers. C’est également une manifestation palpable de la lutte des classes entre la féodalité et les masses populaires.” (*Afrique-Asie* 1976, 123, November 29: XII), meaning that there was ‘a vigorous national campaign against the forces that enslaved the peasantry. We call them the feudal landowners. Their processions of professional criminals and sly murderers are called sorcerers in our country. It is also a tangible manifestation of the class war between the feudal system and the masses’ (*Afrique-Asie* 1976, 123, November 29: XII).

The witch-hunt lasted at least until the first months of 1977. The president aimed at a crushing defeat of the witch doctors: “la dérouté des sorciers”. He addressed the leading witch doctors at a summit meeting in the presidential palace: “Vous, les féticheurs, êtes à l’origine de la sorcellerie et de ses maléfices” – ‘Sorcery and its evil spells have its origins in you, the witch doctors.’ (*Afrique-Asie* 1976, 123, November 29: XXIV). Several months later, in May 1977, the concept of the new Constitution of 1977 showed the following article (Article 134): “Les citoyens de la République Populaire du Bénin ont la liberté de pratiquer une religion. Ils ont la liberté de ne pas pratiquer de religion.” – ‘The citizens of the People’s Republic of Benin are free to practice their religion. They are also free not to do so.’ (Ehuzu 1977, May 23: 6).

With the benefit of hindsight of the Constitution of 1977, the government was not concerned about religion itself; the ban was meant to take a firm grip on the country, its inhabitants and its food production.

The reform of the rural administration as well as the witch-hunt of 1976 seriously influenced my project. It caused several interruptions of the performance events (see 2.4.). Moreover, I am convinced that the choice of the stories that the performers told was influenced by the political context.

2.2. Planning and organisation of the project

At the end of 1975, no expatriate could freely travel in Benin without the official authorization of the Beninese government. It was clear that I needed an ‘ordre de mission’ that stated that I had the official authorization of the Beninese government

to record Fongbe oral tradition. It took several months before I got an introduction to the National Language Commission, the ‘Commission Nationale de Linguistique’ (CNL) and its members. Several members of this commission supported my project in many ways. It also helped that I was fluent in French, the official language in Benin. In the beginning of December 1975, I went to Porto-Novo to the Ministry of National Education to pay a visit to the Director General, Pierre Claver Okoudjou. Thereafter I called on the National Language Commission. They received the project of collecting Fongbe verbal art with enthusiasm. Neither the ministry nor the commission had the means or the people to carry out such a project. The CNL proposed that I first applied for an official authorization and that they would support my request for an ‘ordre de mission’ of the Interior Ministry where national security resorted.²³ On December 21, 1975, I sent a request for a formal authorization to collect and record Fongbe verbal art to the Director General of the Ministry of National Education and received a positive answer, dated January 6, 1976. I got the authorization to visit the following cities and their surroundings: Lokossa, Ouidah, Allada, Abomey and Cotonou. The permit required that I contacted the National Language Commission each time before travelling. The Secretary General of the National Language Commission, Marc Laurent Hazoumé, supported my request to the Interior Ministry for the security clearance to travel. This Ministry controlled security and national orientation and reported directly to the President. Wednesday morning, March 3, I drove to Porto-Novo, for a personal meeting with the Interior and Security Minister Martin Dohou Azonhiho. Born a native Fongbe speaker and apparently interested in verbal art, he was curious to meet the *yovo*, the white person, who was interested in the culture of his own ethnic group. He signed the mission order and wished me success on my travels and research. Copies of the authorization were sent to the ‘Direction de la Police pour les Etrangers’ and the prefects of the provinces Atlantique, Mono and Zou. I was the last foreigner who got security clearance and an ‘ordre de mission’ to travel in three provinces to do research for many years to come. It was also the first time that I saw an official Beninese paper that ended with the following formal greeting: ‘Prêt pour la Révolution. La lutte continue.’

2.3. Preparing for the recording sessions

The preparations for the recording sessions lasted until spring 1976. I took a keen interest in the rural areas in the neighbourhood of Cotonou and I visited local and regional markets. I got twice an invitation to be at a ceremony in the village of Gbgamey that is situated north of Cotonou. This happened at the yearly ‘cérémonie des revenants’, as well as on the occasion of the rare ceremony for a new chief that

²³ I was advised to pay the storytellers a token amount and to accept the story as a gift.

was held once in about twenty years. I became more and more fascinated by the verbal art of the Fon people, its entertainment and educational aspects. I formulated the objective of my fieldwork as follows: I would appreciate to assist to the storytelling sessions for children. I wanted to record the stories that they felt important at the current time. I would like to record the stories *in situ*, when the storytellers addressed their audience.²⁴

I started learning Fongbe in the summer of 1975. My teacher Désiré Vigan was about my age. He was trained at a Roman Catholic seminary and studied accountancy at that time. I continued to take lessons until the recording of the stories started.



Figure 1 Map of Benin, West Africa

²⁴ The map of Benin was downloaded from www.wikipedia.org 2008-02-02.

at the end of March 1976. Désiré Vigan assisted me in transcribing and translating the recorded stories afterwards. I left the People's Republic of Benin in September 1977 with a corpus of 37 transcribed and translated texts.

Collecting the stories

The Secretary General of the National Language Commission told me that storytelling was a regular pastime of his childhood. The habit of storytelling had disappeared from the cities since the fifties of the last century. Storytelling was now fast disappearing from the rural areas too. Still, there were highly appreciated storytellers who delivered their art. The Language Commission strongly advised against doing fieldwork in Ouidah because of the huge Brazilian influence caused by the descendants of former slaves who had returned to their homeland (Verger 1968: 606ff.).

I recorded Fongbe verbal art stories in three villages in the South of Benin during the months April to June in 1976: Ayou, Abomey-Calavi and Abomey. The aim of the fieldwork was to collect Fongbe texts that transmitted the essential cultural and educational values from generation to generation. I chose the sites following the recommendations of the Beninese National Language Commission. Abomey, the capital of the former kingdom, is at 140 km north of the port of Cotonou. Abomey-Calavi is close to the lagoon and was a port in the past. It was also the place where many families originating from Abomey settled; hence the name Abomey-Calavi. Abomey-Calavi is a large and extended village that consists of several nuclei. Ayou is situated 50 kilometres north of Cotonou on the plateau of Allada. The inhabitants live in an isolated area. They speak **Ayizogbe**, a related variety of Fongbe. Their verbal art cherishes the 'myths of the hunter' (Mondjannagni 1977: 88).

The organisation of the event

In 1976, the recording of storytelling sessions was a special event that required a lengthy and thorough organization per village. Especially as a foreigner, I had to be invited as a guest in order to witness a storytelling session. Three assistants gave me considerable support to prepare the recording sessions in each of the villages. All three assistants were born at the site in question: Antoine Togbehazon originated from Ayou, Désiré Vigan grew up in Abomey-Calavi and Julien Tokoudagba came from Abomey. They all were about my age, about thirty years old. They still remembered that storytelling often happened when they were four years old, but they had forgotten most of the stories.

The assistants made all the necessary arrangements to organize the visit of a foreigner who wished to record Fongbe stories. Telecommunication was scarce in the rural areas outside the capital Porto-Novo, and the cities of Cotonou, Abomey

and Ouidah. The usual way to communicate was to send a message by a fortuitous messenger. The three assistants asked a friend who travelled up North to deliver a message on my behalf in their native village. They subsequently took care of everything. After the arrangement of an appointment, I was welcome to attend a storytelling session. One of the assistants always accompanied me when visiting the villages.

2.4. The actual recordings of the corpus

The following section chronologically describes the recordings at the three sites Ayou, Abomey-Calavi and Abomey. The hosts left nothing to coincidence. Each session of storytelling was carefully prepared, including the seating of the performer, the guest and her assistant and the audience. My hosts told me that the stories that I asked for, the stories of Fon heritage that aimed at children's education were called **hwènùxó**.

Experienced storytellers were willing to perform the stories. They chose themselves the stories that they wanted to perform. The majority of the storytellers of the corpus were women. None of the storytellers exactly knew their year of birth and estimated it by relating it to an important event that had happened in their village at the time of their birth. The storytellers spoke Fongbe, although sometimes they used Gungbe or Nagogbe words, in particular in the songs that accompanied some of the stories. The two storytellers in Ayou spoke **Ayizogbe**, a Gbelanguage that has some Yoruba features. They were the only storytellers who were literate in French. The members of the National Language Commission assured me that **Ayizogbe** belonged to the speech community of the Fongbe.²⁵ The other 13 storytellers told me that they did not need writing or reading because they had a good memory.

The Ayou recordings

Monday, April 12, I started recording stories with a pilot session in Ayou. The idea of the pilot was to test the equipment, and to find an optimal arrangement of the recorder and microphone. The local authorities gave me permission to start recording after they urged me to look at ten women who were chained up one to another. They told me that these women were witches, 'sorcières'. Some moments later, to my surprise, I ran into two of the village's **vodunsi**, 'fetish priestesses', meaning literally 'wives of the **vodun**', who walked freely. I noticed that these women were highly regarded by the villagers. Then we sat together with my hosts in front of a hut, under a roof made from dried palm leaves. I met Cece and Louis

²⁵ Quite to the contrary, Capo considers the language a Phla-Phera lect (Capo 1991: 1, 2, 5).

Klikpo who were good-humoured septuagenarians and famous storytellers. The Klikpo brothers were traditional doctors. They had written a pharmacopoeia about the local herbs and medicines that they used. These two storytellers had prepared their performance before my arrival at the village. They had made a list – in French – of the stories that they wanted to tell. They told eight stories in three sessions. The third Klikpo brother Germain was present amongst the audience.

The second time I arrived in Ayou I watched a ceremony of the **vodunsi** who left the convent or ‘thicket’ at the occasion of the achieved initiation of young novices.²⁶ The wet season had begun; the ceremony was in honour of the one whose name must not be spoken, **Sakpata**, the god of rain and fertility. The second and third recording sessions in Ayou took place inside a hut. Five out of the eight Ayou texts were trickster stories about **Yògbó**. I strongly suspect that the choice to tell the comic trickster stories coincided with the political situation in the village.

The Abomey-Calavi recordings

In May 1976, I went for the first time to Abomey-Calavi, a forty minutes’ drive from Cotonou. My Fongbe teacher Désiré Vigan was born in Abomey-Calavi; he came along as language consultant. We arrived at 6 PM and stayed until 9 PM at the Zomagba compound. The storytelling took place in the hut of Clémentine Zomagba, one of the storytellers. The early evening traditionally was the part of the day that they told stories in Abomey-Calavi. The storytellers were enthusiastic performers, once they got used to the cassette recorder and the microphone. I explained the recording technique and they enjoyed hearing their own voices. However, they did not allow me to take pictures, explaining that they feared that I should take a part of their soul with me. They explained to me that one could not join the ancestors with a broken soul. Four women and six children attended the performances of four stories.

The second session in Abomey-Calavi started also at 6 PM. This time there was some food: grilled sardines and **wǎ** – the typical West African ‘porridge’ made of cornmeal. After the meal, a number of women put bits of **wǎ** on the small calabashes that stood in front of several statuettes in a hut that was a place of worship. The statuettes presented twins and children with an umbilical hernia. The **wǎ** was a sacrifice to the children that had passed away. The storytelling started right after the offering worship. We moved to the compound of Zomagba to attend the performances. We sat outside, in front of the rectangular hut. Six women, four men and seven children were present. The storytelling went on until the youngest children fell asleep. By then it was past 9 PM. Two men and one woman told four stories in total.

²⁶ Officially, these ceremonies were prohibited since 1975.

In the beginning of June, I drove to Abomey-Calavi for a third visit. When we wanted to start the recording session, the Mayor and the newly appointed Revolutionary Delegate, intruded in the hut, whereupon the audience left. The Mayor welcomed me and invited me to accompany him into his office to get the recordings done. This session widely differed from the preceding sessions. The audience consisted of only two persons, the Mayor and the Revolutionary Delegate. The storyteller was a young man who originated from Ayou. He performed three stories that were clearly intended to provoke the authorities. At first they marvelled at the topic of sexual harassment instigated by women (AC 9, AC 11). Then they got angry. The performer did not use the introductory formula of a story, but started with 'long ago' and 'this is about the hunter'. During this session, the language consultant refused to explain what exactly was going on. The Revolutionary Delegate got very angry with the last two of the texts, for he thought that they were offensive. He stopped the storyteller and the recording. My consultant and I left the Mayor and the Delegate. Without saying a word, we went to the compound of the Zomagba clan where the session continued privately. All present were nervous, for the intrusion of the authorities had been frightening, though we acted as if it was a hilarious laughingstock.

The fourth and last session in Abomey-Calavi took place a few days later, again at the Zomagba compound. We sat inside the hut, though the weather was nice. Only women storytellers attended this session. The audience consisted of six women and seven children. The situation had clearly changed since April 14, when sorcerers of both sexes were widely accused of homicide or murder.

The Abomey recordings

I arrived at 9.30 AM in Porto-Novo at the National Language Commission (CNL) on June 14 to pick up Julien Tokoudagba. I was happy that he would accompany me as a language consultant to Abomey, once the capital of the Kingdom of **Danxomè**, where he was born. I had not given notice of my arrival to the Community Councillors of Abomey, still remembering my experience with the Mayor of Abomey-Calavi. I hoped that I could avoid a repetition of the censored session in Abomey-Calavi.

On our arrival in Abomey, the first thing to do was to inform the District Chief. I was to show him the authorization of Interior Minister Azanhiho. When I eventually got to see him, he formally informed me that I needed his official authorization in writing to visit the three communes of Abomey. In view of the authorization that I had, he had no right to refuse, but I thought it unwise to quarrel with the District Chief. I needed his cooperation. I was to get the authorization to travel to the three communes of Abomey the next morning.

I got the authorization of the District Chief the next morning indeed. Nevertheless, his authorization was not sufficient. The Revolutionary Delegates from the three communes of Abomey, when shown the formal authorization, informed me that they wanted to censor the recording session. They asked me to come back in a few weeks so that they could arrange things. This specimen of bureaucracy shocked my language consultant and me. Actually, being a member of the National Language Commission, he was involved in the project from the very beginning. He invited me to visit his family. We got into the car and drove away. However, three black Peugeot cars, typical government cars, followed us. It took more than half an hour to lose the officials that pursued us. Finally, we arrived at the compound of the Tokoudagba family without anyone on our tail. They agreed to a storytelling session.

Early next morning I arrived at the Tokoudagba's compound. **Nage Tokoudagba**, an 81-year-old woman told four stories. She was the most remarkable performer I ever met. She started the first story that she told with a brief introduction of herself, when the consultant invited her to do so. She had a very low jazzy voice, and performed one story that was actually a long song in between a spoken prologue and an epilogue (A 3). She sang like singing the blues and accompanied herself by drumming on her flat old woman's breasts, often on the left side of her body (A 3).²⁷ Two of the performer's stories were similar to those told in Abomey-Calavi. To my amazement, the adults sent children out of the dwelling during the performance of the first four texts. The children in Abomey-Calavi had attended the performances of similar stories! After she finished the fourth story, the children joined the session. Then they told five more stories, though in very brief versions compared to the length of the stories that the performers told in the two other villages. Two youngsters told the last two stories. A four-year-old girl recited a dilemma tale and a ten-year-old boy performed a **Yɔgbó** trickster story while the audience helped him to tell the story, and heartily encouraged him.

That same afternoon Julien Tokoudagba unexpectedly came by to see me. He was deeply worried and asked me to accompany him to the centre of Abomey where one of his aunts stood on trial for having poisoned two children. We drove to a small square where I parked my car. There stood some 20 people down the road waiting for the inevitable things to come. They made sure that they would protect me, come what may. They kept their promise by putting me literally standing in their midst. They pressed my back against an enormous iroko tree and convinced me that one could hardly see me. The accused woman came out of a hut; two men accompanied her. The poor woman's face was ashen. She gazed at the people present without

²⁷ Maupoil and Konrad both also reported this combination of singing and drumming: **xo akɔ**, meaning 'drumming the breasts' (Maupoil 1988: 28, Konrad 1985: 16).

seeing them. The trial started with a few remarks that the accused had to answer only by yes and no. She incriminated herself by coercion. Yes, she had given a medicine to both of the children and yes, they had died. The Revolutionary Delegates immediately, and without hesitation, concluded that she had confessed her crimes. The sentence for her was to die from dehydration. She went back into the small hut on the square. Later, I heard that she died after two days.

The summary conviction that I witnessed in Abomey meant the end of my recording sessions. I realized that I would not pay another call to one of the villages.

2.5. Transcription and translation

The corpus consists of thirty-seven recorded Fongbe stories.²⁸ The size of the corpus is about 57 000 words. I transcribed the recordings into written Fongbe in 1976 and 1977, while living in Benin. I used the official Beninese spelling of 1975 for the transcription of the stories.²⁹ At the same time, I translated the recordings and their transcriptions into a literal French version (gloss level). My language consultant Désiré Vigan assisted me in working on the stories from Abomey-Calavi and Abomey during three or four mornings a week. Philippe Honsoun, who grew up in Ayou helped me working on five of the Ayou stories. The only dictionary available at the time was the one written by Segurola.

Unfortunately, the recordings of seven transcribed texts disappeared after the transcription (AC 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). I copied the remaining 31 records on audiotapes in 1977, and again in 1980.

In the years following the fieldwork in Benin, I checked upon the transcriptions and the French translations of the stories. However, I had to work for a living. This forced me to store the tapes and the manuscripts in a metal case in a vault. That was back in 1981. I resumed a study of the Fongbe texts in 2004. I typed out the Fongbe transcriptions and the French translation in glosses before translating the texts into English.

I digitized the original audio sound recordings in 2007. I analysed the recordings with 'Praat', the software programme by Paul Boersma and David Weenink (www.praat.org or www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/). The digitized wave files increased the options of checking the transcriptions. Overall, the transcriptions proved to be appropriate. However, it enabled me to review the discrepancy between the records

²⁸ I used a portable automatic cassette recorder for recording and transcribing the stories: Philips N 2206, N 2208.

²⁹ At first, Désiré Vigan refused to transcribe the remarks from the audience, in vain trying to convince me that the audience's interference was odd.

and the original transcripts and to add a lot of small corrections and delicate nuances in the course of my analysis. I corrected several fragments that Désiré Vigan had added to the text to clarify omissions by the performer. Digitization also allowed me to do a quantitative analysis of the utterances and the pauses.

3. The verbal art of the Fon: the performance witnessed

I will describe the event of the performance in this section. I consider the performance a way of speaking that intentionally entertains the audience. The story itself conveys a way of living that is exemplary. The performance conveys the dual sense of the artistic action and the artistic event (Bauman 1974: 290; see p. 34). One of the main features of the performance is the very orderly discourse. The performer acts naturally and vivaciously, yet the performance is amazingly flawless and elaborate. Listening to the recorded material makes clear that storytelling must be an acquired skill.

The present chapter surveys the main physical features of the artistic event. I will describe the key elements of the event: the setting, the performer, the art form and the audience. The description of the event itself is in terms of the schedule, time of day and location, and the seating during a session. I will describe the performers and the role of gender in the choice of different types of stories. Then I will pay attention to the interactive relationship between performer and audience. The chapter ends with the differences between the religious ceremonies and the performances of **hwènùxó**.

3.1. The setting of the performance

The performances only took place at a pre-arranged time. I arrived at the appointed hour, and parked my car at the outskirts of the village. A troop of children met my assistant and me, and together we walked to my hosts. In the village, a number of people were present to attend the event. They all shook hands with me, before walking together to an **apatam** to welcome me formally. An **apatam** is an indigenous cabin that is set up in a central location in the village or within a compound. The hut has a round shape. It has a one-meter high fence that is made of sawed logs. Several high branches in the fence support the cone-shaped roof, which is made from dried palm leaves. An **apatam** is a pleasant and airy room to stay.³⁰

After we entered the **apatam**, the clan's chief welcomed the guest with the traditional greeting **a fón à**, literally meaning 'Did you wake up?', that is 'How are you?'. I answered his question **en un fón** 'Yes I woke up', that is 'Thank you! I am fine!' and asked him the same question. The chief carried on asking after the health of my family and clan members, whether they were real or imaginary. At my turn, I repeated his questions referring to the same family member as the chief did. This so-called **mlan mlan**, 'praising', went on and on, and so we assured one another that our parents and grandparents were well, all our brothers, sisters, uncles, nephews,

³⁰ The chief of the clan or the village often owns an **apatam**.

aunts, cousins, all of them, even our ancestors, were doing fine. During this dialogue, we looked each of us the other steadily into the eyes. I failed only on one occasion, and blinked. The chief felt obliged to restart our greetings, and we started the complete dialogue again.

After this dialogue was finished, the second part of the protocol started. This part consisted of the libations to pay respect to the ancestors. One of the participants drew some fresh water from the well in the half of a round calabash. The chief took a sip, and poured out some drops on the ground to offer as libation to the ancestors. He handed the calabash to me, and I imitated his acts. I wet my lips with a small quantity of water, and ported my respect to the ancestors by pledging some water on the ground. Then one of the older women cupped my breasts with both her hands to check whether I was what I said I was, a woman.

I was told that the practice of praising was part of the formalities to be followed when an important guest visited the village. At my first visit to Ayou and to Abomey-Calavi, the practice of welcoming me as a foreign visitor was similar. I do not know whether this practice was strictly set up or partly impromptu. It was by no means a spontaneous event. However, after the praising, the hosts made clear that they enjoyed very much welcoming their guest. About half an hour after my arrival, the hosts seated the guest and her assistant, and the storyteller and everybody present sat down. It was performance time. The Tokoudagba clan in Abomey skipped the protocol, and the oldest woman storyteller immediately started her performance. There was a general feeling of tension that day, which gave me the impression that she deliberately left out the praising for not wasting our time.

Storytelling usually takes place in the evening after the working day is finished. This is at sunset, around seven o'clock in tropical West Africa. It is dark in the villages, except for a rare oil lamp. However, the practice proved different. Depending on the situation, stories may be told anytime. The three sessions in Ayou took place in the morning for the practical reason that the road to Ayou is a 'terre de barre' red sand path where a car can hardly pass at night. The session in Abomey occurred also in the morning.³¹ The sessions in Abomey-Calavi indeed occurred in the evening. The sessions lasted two to three hours, whether during the day or at night. It is obvious that Fon people themselves consider storytelling as a pleasant pastime in the evening, but that they are occasionally prepared to perform during the day.

Storytelling proved to be an activity in its own right. Storytelling is not a sideline that people combine with other activities, like grinding maize or cooking food. However, women performers exceptionally breastfeed their infants while performing. The whining sounds of a baby occasionally are audible on the recordings.

³¹ See 2.4.3.

The location of the performance

The location of the performance is one of the compounds within a village of the rural areas in the south of Benin. The compound is square space hedged with a fence, which holds a number of rectangular huts of dried mud brick that have a metal roof. The main hut has a terrace at the front alongside the longest side of the hut; the terrace has a roof of dried palm leaves. The chief's dwelling has a round *apatam* to gather the complete clan. There is a fireplace. The compound has also a hut intended for the ancestors where the clan keeps the *aséén*, the iron portable altars adorned with pendants and feathers, one for each ancestor.

The sessions took place at different locations depending on the weather and the time of the day. I gathered the corpus in the wet season. When it rained, the recording took place inside a hut, or at the covered terrace in front of the hut.

When the rain stopped, the performance took place outside a hut or in the *apatam*.

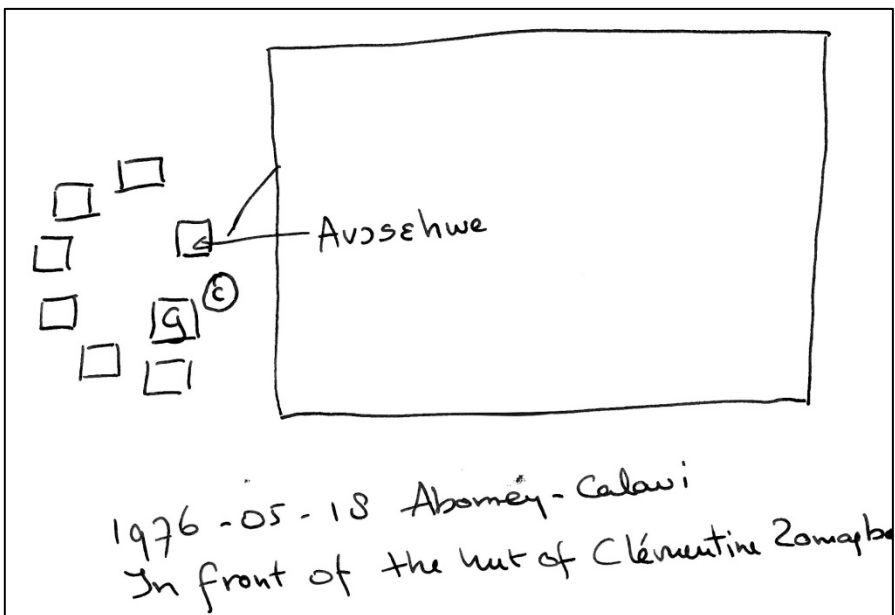


Figure 2 Seating in Abomey-Calavi

However, sometimes as time passed by, we went inside a hut. There is a difference between a session outside a hut and the sessions inside. The outside session seduces the walking passers-by to keep halt to listen. An inside session is more private, and hence rarely interrupted by a visitor.

The seating of the performer and the audience, of the guest and the assistant, was more or less similar during all sessions. The performer sat on a wooden chair. The hosts seated the guest on an identical chair, right across the storyteller. Figure 2 shows the seating in Abomey-Calavi on 5 May 1976, when performer **Avosehwe** told two stories (AC 7, AC 8). The consultants sat usually on a wooden stool at my right side in Abomey-Calavi and Abomey, which was practical, for it allowed them to brief me after each story. The consultant in Ayou, on the contrary, sat on my left side. Notice that Fongbe religious devices are the mirror image of the Yoruba devices. Ayou and its language are close to the Yoruba region and this influence shows in many details (see p. 21, note 7).

The audience sat on benches on the terrace when the performance was outside the hut and on a bed when the performance was inside the hut. Children sat on mats on

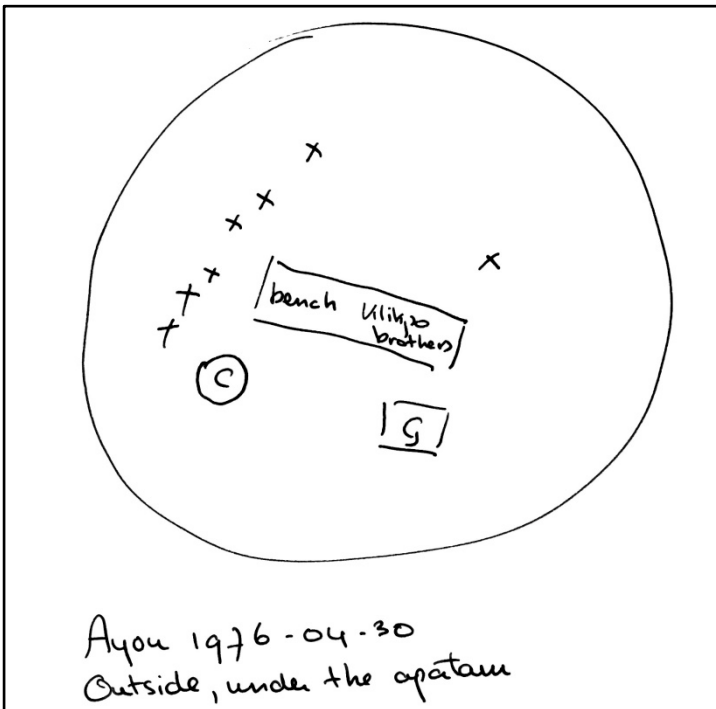


Figure 3 Seating in Ayou

the floor. During the sessions, I placed the cassette recorder within the circle of the audience, but between the chair of the performer and my chair, to be sure that I was the only person who was able to flip the switch. I did not ask questions during the performance, for I did not want to disturb the ongoing performance.

Figure 3 shows the seating at the **Klikpo** brothers' place in Ayou. The Klikpo brothers in Ayou were also traditional doctors. They had a special hut, that served to see the patients who wanted to consult them. They received me at the hut's terrace that had a fence of dried palm leaves. The second and third session took place inside their guest hut due to the heavy rainfall. The audience sat in a circle with the performer sitting on a chair; the guest, too, sat on a chair, while the assistant sat on a stool. The audience sat on wooden benches, and the children sat on mats on the floor.

In Abomey-Calavi, most of the recordings took place in the compound of the Zomagba clan, often outside, in front of a hut, but sometimes inside. On one occasion, the mayor required that the recording took place in his office, a two-storied house.

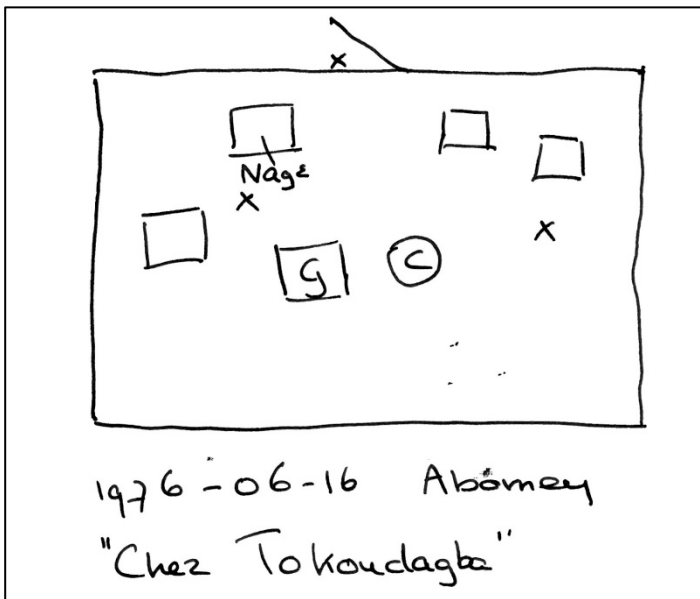


Figure 4 Seating in Abomey

Figure 4 shows the seating in Abomey. In Abomey, the first recording took place at the back of the office of the District Chief. The other recordings took place at the compound of the Tokoudagba clan, inside the hut of **Nage Tokoudagba**.

3.2. The performers

At the time of the recording of the corpus, there were families of storytellers in each village. These families considered performing an artistic profession that required a lifetime of practice to be an accomplished performer. The performers often told me that one was a storyteller at the age of forty, but that the best performers were in their late sixties (see appendix ‘Storytellers’ for details).

The corpus consists of stories told by both genders. Women told 21 out of 37 stories, and men told 16 stories. In this sense, the corpus differs from all the previous corpora of Fongbe verbal art, for it presents a majority of women performers. Earlier collections even state that all storytellers are men (Le Hérissé 1911: 255, Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 6).

Two men performed the first eight stories that I recorded in Ayou. Both performers were in their seventies. The Klikpo brothers belonged to a locally famous clan of storytellers. The performers in Abomey-Calavi told 19 stories, of whom four women performed 14 stories. Members of the Zomagba clan told most of the stories in Abomey-Calavi. The oldest woman was 75 years old. This was Clémentine Zomagba, who was born in Abomey. She performed six stories. The other three women were nearly 40 years old. In Abomey-Calavi, two men told each a story, and one man told three stories. One of them was about 50 years old; he was a wanderer who journeyed a lot in Benin and its neighbouring countries. The other two men were much younger. One was about twenty years old, and the second one was in his twenties and originated from Ayou. He was a hand in Abomey-Calavi, and he was the one who performed at the mayor’s office. Members of the Tokoudagba clan told all the stories in Abomey. This family was well known for its talents, and yielded a number of artists in the field of performance and painting. The 81-year-old Nage Tokoudagba told four out of ten stories. Some of her next of kin attended the session, and a 50-year-old daughter told two stories and a son of 60 years told one story. After this, they presented a four year old granddaughter who recited a dilemma tale and a ten year old grandson who performed a trickster story while the audience helped and encouraged him.

Gender and Age

Let us consider whether gender plays a role in the performances of the corpus. The majority of the authors of previously published corpora mentioned that the performers were men. The Herskovitses apologized for the absence of women storytellers, which was based on hearsay that there were no women interpreters available. Konrad was the only woman author who was able to gather stories told by

women. She described the differences between men and women when telling the popular verbal art **gli**, the imaginative oral narrative:

Among the Ewe, both men and women performed tales. More often than not, however, men were the primary storytellers. Women tended to be more reserved and thus, contact with them was more difficult. Once they came forth and proper introductions were made, women proved to be very adept storytellers, although stylistically different from men. While men tended to be more animated, and told, in many cases, raucously wild and bawdy tales, women were more subdued and deliberate in their telling. Controlling their audience through measured pacing, they tended to pay more attention to character descriptions and the motivational aspects of character's actions. (Konrad 1985: 3).

The corpus consists of both comic and dramatic stories: all comic stories were told by men, while women only told dramatic stories. Nonetheless, performers sometimes wove a dramatic part into comic stories, or they whetted the audience's appetite by deliberately putting a spicy sequence into dramatic stories.

Dramatic stories tell about the lack of compassion for smaller beings, or the disrespect for life. Women dealt with misbehaviour, and the difficulties of life within a family. The stories told by women warned against the neglect of due respect to the ancestors or the forgetting of libations. These stories often refer to the importance of religious devices and the use of gris-gris (see 5.5.). Women tell also dilemma tales.

Men told Fongbe comic stories about the trickster **Yògbó**. This matches the description by Konrad that men tell the Ewe **Yiyi** comic stories (Konrad 1985: 3). The Klikpo brothers from Ayou performed also two trickster stories that pictured a different character as central participant. Men told stories about the huge gap between the vagant hunter and the sedentary king. However, men delivered also stories about the self-confidence and trust of the lonely orphan. Finally, men told stories about sexual harassment by women (AC 9, AC 11). These stories are probably an example of the so-called dramatized amorous stories that Herskovits mentioned, though he admitted that he was unable to collect them (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 10; see also chapter 7).

The performers did not explain whether gender was the reason that men tell trickster stories and women tell dramatic stories and dilemma tales. The explanation may be life itself. Divination and the consulting of **Fa** is a man's job, as is hunting and palavering. Women are responsible for raising the children and growing food.³² The **vodun** cult and its due sacrifices are a common duty of both sexes. It is probable

³² In the 19th century, the king's serfs worked on the field.

that the distinct tasks in the Fon rural society are the point at issue. Previous authors who interviewed men performers published several stories that are similar to those of the corpus told by women. This shows that the stories are part of the community, or rather part of a common past.

3.3. Gestures in performance: kinetics

Kinetics is the extra asset of the performer. I can only describe my impressions in this section, because my audio-recording device did not capture the gestures of the performers. Kinetics transforms the virtual actions into gestures that create a nearly touchable reality. Performers usually sit on a chair when performing. Performers love to bring a story to life for the enjoyment of the audience. They emphasize the performance through their gestures, body language and facial expressions. They move the upper part of their body, and they continuously gesticulate. Performers thrill the audience by adopting scenic elements like picturing the movements of the agent of whom they are talking.³³ They point their fingers at the agent, as if it is here with us, and show how it moves and where it is going. This underlining is easy to spot in the discourse, for the Fongbe grammar has a range of deictic markers, whether it is the stand alone deictic marker, or a combination of demonstrative pronouns together with the definite particle (see 14.2. Style). Some storytellers modulate their voice to picture the different agents, for example the voice of the coward husband in AC 2.

Performers try to capture the attention of the audience before starting the performance by saying a superfluous remark, for example: **égbé ɔ** ‘today’ (Ay 2), **din ɔ** ‘now here we go!’ (A 1). Once a performer started with the remark **é yá à** ‘is it ready?’ and he pointed at the cassette recorder (A 6). These remarks are followed by more specific remarks that concern the story, such as **d’ayí ɔ** ‘in olden times’ (Ay 4, AC 10), or the expression **xóxó d’ayí ɔ** ‘the words of olden times’ (A 6). Gestures accompany these remarks as well.

The performer of Fongbe storytelling does not read aloud from a book or an autocue. On the contrary, the performance gives the impression that the performer shapes the story on the personal mood of the moment and the reactions of the audience.

There is an apparent difference between the performance of Fongbe storytelling, and European storytelling. This stems from the gap that dissociates the oral character of performing from reading aloud. The performance is reminiscent of the performances by professional stand-up comedians and cabaret performers. The analogy with Fon

³³ See 5.3. Agents

performing includes a fine sense of timing and humour, and a continuous rapport with the audience.³⁴

3.4. The interaction with the audience

The performance of Fongbe storytelling traditionally takes place in front of an audience. The audience is not passively listening to the performer; it plays an interactive role. The audience consists of adults and children. The adults are often performers themselves, and wait quietly for their turn to perform. The interaction between the performer and the adult audience is part of the performance. The children in the audience are quietly listening. An audience that shows no reaction after the initial utterances makes a performer nervous. Once, a performer asked whether the audience wanted her to stop performing. The interaction takes often place to show approval of the performance, using the expression **ahên** ‘right so!’.

The audience participates actively in the process of storytelling, for example, by commenting on the words used by the storyteller. The audience angrily interrupted a storyteller, who was not a native Fongbe speaker, by saying: ‘Don’t say so-and-so! We say so!’ The audience also praises the performer either by roaring with laughter or by repeating the last utterance of the performer, who promptly joins in with the audience. When a performer delivers the peak of the story and gives a loud laugh, it often happens that the performer and the audience howl with laughter, and have a lot of fun. On the other hand, the audience uses interventions to encourage the performer, for example by intervening with a flash forward. The audience also interrupts the performer by asking superficial questions. I found the following questions and answers in the corpus: The performer said ‘This is the third time!’ Then the audience asked ‘Is this the third time?’ The storyteller answered: ‘I just said so’ (AC 2).

The performer told how the rim of the saucepot is greased with a sticky **bò** ‘gris-gris’ or ‘magic glue’. Then the audience said ‘Please, tell us: what is a ‘gris-gris’?’ The performer answered: ‘Well, you certainly know the ‘gris-gris’ (AC 2). Fongbe people credit a number of objects with magic power. These objects are called **bò** in the case of soap or glue. Diviners also give talismans and amulets that are called **bòcyò** in Fongbe and gris-gris in French.

³⁴ The similarity only accounts for the features of the performance, it does not account for the difference of content, or genre that separates verbal art from cabaret (see part 2). The performance involves a sophisticated use of stylistic devices (see part 4 Style).

When the performer mentioned the gift of a strong male horse, the audience asked ‘What is a strong male horse?’ The performer answered ‘The strong male horse from Hwawè’ (AC 3).³⁵ Another example of interventions occurs, when the audience comments on the denouement: ‘The saucepot reveals the secret!’ (AC 2). Interventions also show pity and compassion. When a performer mentioned that the leopard kills a kitten, the audience cried ‘She is heartless!’ (Ay 5). But when a performer told how the leopard kills her own cub, supposing that she kills a kitten, and added the comment ‘Can you believe this!’ the audience is laughing and cheering the kitten’s survival (AC 16). The interaction of the audience is part of the performance. It makes also obvious that the audience recognizes at least a number of elements and the topic of the story.

3.5. Ceremonies versus verbal art

I will first enter into the specifics of ceremonies, before embarking on the performance of verbal art. The Fon society has a number of different ceremonies and rituals to honour the gods and to celebrate important events from the past. These ceremonies also call to mind the ancestors who remain part of the clan (Agboton 1997: 42; see also p. 23).

Ceremonies and other special events take place during the day on the days when people do not work. In general, ceremonies are accompanied by music. The orchestra consists of several different types of musical instruments of which the drums play the leading role. Other instruments are the **agídígbó**, ‘lamellophone’, the **gan**, ‘iron gong’, and the **gò**, ‘gourds’ (see AC 10). The music continues as long as the ceremony itself takes, and this may take hours. Some of the ceremonies have a verbal art component, when the musicians beat the drums and the audience cheers for recognizing the tune of a song of a specific story. The function of dancing is to perform rituals as a part of the ceremonies. During the formal ceremony, the priests dance to honour the gods and particularly the ancestors. The ceremony of the ghosts for example is a ceremonial dance that takes a great part of the day. The dancers wear ritual clothes with richly ornamented garments, huge decorated masks, and leg- and footwear made of raw jute. The clothes and paraphernalia of the priests remind the audience of the gods they embody. Their faces are whitened with kaolin; however, they wear masks and are unrecognizable for the audience. Various drums accompany the dancers. The audience watches the dances for hours while chewing cola nuts to protect themselves against the ghosts. Dancing also takes place during a

³⁵ The horse refers to **Hwawè**, a village near Abomey where the kings of **Danxomè** bred horses. The horse also reminds us of the **sogan**, the minister who was responsible of the looting and collecting of wealth in the Kingdom of **Danxomè** (see 1.2.).

minor religious ceremony or a ritual for a specific god. The dances are performed by a specific group, for example by the new young priestesses who dance after having left the thicket where they were initiated into the cult of a god, as I was able to watch in Ayou.

The dress code is formal. The complete clan dresses up to celebrate the days of the ceremonies. Women wear gowns that are embroidered at the front and the neckline, and they have an elegant and intricate folded scarf on their heads. Men wear trousers and a gown, and the long **agbada**, a kind of antique toga over their shoulder. This toga figures in one of the Abomey-Calavi stories (see AC 3). Chiefs and diviners walk around carrying an ebony walking stick with a silver knob and their heads are covered with the typical conical Fon bonnet. After the ceremony and the libations are finished, it is party time. People enjoy the feast; they eat a lot, and drink imported alcoholic drinks.

Let us consider the difference between an after-initiation event and the ceremony of the ghosts. The dances are performed in the midst of the village. Life in the village goes on while the initiated girls dance. People stop for a glance at the dancers, they comment on the dancing, and walk on. This event only has a discrete audience. The girls who leave the thicket after their initiation are dressed up in the colours of the god in question. One of the favourite colours at these occasions is the colour red, though white occasionally occurs. For example, the **vodunsi** of **Xeviosù** and **Sakpata** I watched in Ayou were fully dressed up in several layers of wraps, some of them having a lace edging around their waist. They wore red-cropped tops. There was a heavy layered cotton belt tied around their breasts. Their heads were adorned with a red braided hair band. They wore several necklaces of red beads. Many garlands of red and white coloured cowries at their shoulders were crossed in front of their bodies and at their backs. Strings of white cowries were tied around their arms and ankles.

The Fon people have also specific groups that organize the dances at marriages and burials. People are fully dressed up when participating in burials and marriages. They buy yards of the same cloth to provide new gowns for the clan and the extended family. The women dress in robes embroidered at the front and the neckline, and they wrap a huge scarf around their head. The men wear an embroidered shirt and trousers, and a conical hat that is made from the same cloth.

The elaborate ceremonies still show traces from the elite culture that characterized the former kingdom. The main features are the jubilant dressing up of the participants, the crucial role of the priests and the rituals, and the ubiquitous part of the musicians and the dancers.

Let us now consider the sessions of performances of verbal art. These are an event in itself. The event is a way to relax in the evening, and to sit down to forget the strains

of the working day. The performance of storytelling has the function to entertain the audience by the way of performing. The story itself has an educational function. The event takes place at home. The dress code for storytelling is casual; neither the performer nor the audience is dressed up for the event. Fon people wear indigenous clothes. The women cover themselves in large wrappers that they wrap either around their waist or around their breasts. Some women wear sleeveless tops. The men wear often a loose-fitting shirt and trousers similar to a pyjama. In Ayohie, a number of men wore a medium-sized wrapper around their waist. The clothes are often made of the locally indigo dyed and batiked cloth. On the other hand, colours like for example purple, deep green or faded yellow dyed cloth are popular, as is the imported wax cloth from the Netherlands. Only one performer in Abomey-Calavi, originating from Porto-Novo, wore a tailored gown, and she had a scarf artfully wrapped around her head (AC 14, 16, 18). The Fon dress code and the performance in a seated position differ from the description of the Ewe comic **Yiyi** stories (Konrad 1985: 93). The Fongbe performers do not dance during a performance of storytelling in spite of what foreigners think.

Ceremonies are a celebration of the unity of the community that includes the ancestors. Two issues are crucial when it comes to perceive the distinct functions of ceremonies and the performance of verbal art in Fon society; these are the dress code and the fact that dancing is part of a ceremony. Unlike the ceremonies, the setting of the performance of verbal art is relaxed, and both the performer and the audience wear casual clothes. The performance is a speech event that focuses on the content and its presentation.

4. Concluding remarks about the event

In 1976, I asked three rural communities to organise a number of sessions of storytelling. I requested to attend a session where they convey the do's and don'ts in the dwelling to their children. It appeared that the session aimed also at entertaining the audience. The sessions took place at the compound of a clan. The seating of the people who attended the session was always identical: the performer and the guest were sitting opposite to each other. The audience gathered around them, facing the performer. A storytelling event is a way to relax in the evening, and to sit down to forget the strains of the working day. Neither the performer nor the audience were dressed up for the event; men wear indigenous clothes, women wear wrappers. The Fon performers do not dance during a performance of storytelling. Storytelling has nothing in common with the various Fon ceremonies where priests or priestesses dance formal dances. Ceremonies may take several days, and often take place during the weekend, for example on two successive Saturdays. Ceremonies go with ritual sacrifices, dancing priests and formal dressing up. Storytelling definitely differs from ritual ceremonies in many ways.

I recorded the stories on audiocassettes. I transcribed and translated the texts into French in Benin, in 1976 and 1977. In 2007, the sound recordings were digitized for further analysis. The corpus consists of about 57 000 words, and about 12 000 utterances. This allows an in-depth analysis of Fongbe narrative discourse. My analysis concerns the Fongbe discourse of the performers of stories in the rural areas of the south of Benin at the time of the recordings.

The content of the corpus has its roots in the 19th century Kingdom of **Danxomè** during the reigns of Guezo and Glele, when it was at its apogee. The vehicle language is Fongbe, a language whose grammar was described by French missionaries in the second part of the 20th century (see 1.4.). The stories convey the **vodun** religion and its powerful cults. The stories refer to the gods of the religious pantheons that were worshipped in 1976. They certainly differ from the new pantheons that were developed in recent times. In 1976, at the time of the recording of the corpus, the traditional authority of the chief, the priest and the diviner was still intact in the rural areas. The administration forbade the traditional religion; the traditional power structure was about to be dismantled at the time of the recordings. The performers were willing to organise the storytelling sessions because they were well aware of the threat to their culture.

Half of the performers of the corpus were men and women in their seventies. The audience considered them accomplished performers. All performers were illiterate with the exception of two men who wrote French. This demonstrates that the aesthetical and artistic finesse does not depend on the literacy of the performers.

The gender of the performer influences the kind of stories that are chosen, for women tell dramatic stories, and men tell comic stories. Women weave comic elements into dramatic stories. Gender may point at the use of distinct elements in stories.

Performers used kinetics to support the prosody of the discourse and to point at the agents and their actions in the story. The audience consisted of adults and young children. The adults interacted with the performer; they approved of an issue or anticipated on the story. This interaction was part of the performance.

It appears that the performance is more than skilfully reciting a text, or twisting one's voice to impersonate a character. The performer really has the floor. She or he is a professional artist who manages three competences together: the eloquence of the professional speaker, the acting of the dramatic actor, and the showmanship of an entertainer. In 1976, the performers and the audience considered the performance of the Fongbe **hwènùxó** an acquired art.

Part 2: Elements of hwènùxó

Part 2: Elements of **hwènùxó**

In the second part of this book, I will describe the various elements that enter into the composition of Fongbe verbal art. Chapter 5 brings to life the elements of the **hwènùxó** and the **yèxó**, the dramatic and the comic stories. I will specify the world of the stories and the leading role of the central participant. The chapter also captures the part of the agents who come in pairs. I will give a survey of the impact of the Fon religious devices before embarking on the main topic of the stories of the corpus, which is power and power relations, in chapter 6. In chapter 7, I will discuss the genre of the **hwènùxó**. Chapter 8 finishes part 2 with conclusive remarks.

5. Elements of Fongbe stories

The present chapter describes the elements that characterise the Fongbe **hwènùxó**. I will describe all elements that convey the cultural codes of the Fon society (see p. 33ff.). I will explain the elements that are essential to grasp the meaning, since they convey religious issues that foreigners or uninitiated outsiders easily misunderstand. I will describe the setting and the decor. I will furthermore consider the role of the central participant. Actually, he is the only character that figures in the stories, though he is not a human being. I will also describe the pair of agents and their roles. Agents do not come to life. They do not have a face, they impersonate functions in the Fon society. I will also discuss the crucial role of the traditional religion including the gods, the cult of the ancestors and the religious devices of the **Fa** divination. Finally, I will consider the fundamental principle of duality and the basic topic of the **hwènùxó**.

5.1. The world of the Fongbe stories

The stories of the corpus are all set in the surroundings that are familiar to the performers and the audience. This world consists of a series of dwellings and the market in a nearby village. It consists also of **dǔn**, meaning ‘over there’ or ‘the supernatural world’. Performers also use the expression **to ɖe mè** ‘in a certain country’ (AC 5). Performers refer to **dǔn** by mentioning religious devices and by dropping hints about the symbols or appearances of the gods and the ancestors. Gods may stay for some time in the huge iroko tree as in a temporary abode. Therefore, Fon people believe that the iroko tree is a sacred tree that one must not fell. This tree is for example the temporary shelter of the cat’s children in one of the Cat- and-leopard stories (AC 16). The territory between the dwelling and the supernatural world is inimical to human beings. This territory consists of two sites; **zunkan**, ‘the

forest', that is the abode where the thunder god **Xeviosù** and the monster with thirty horns live, and **tò**, 'the lagoon', where **Sakpata**, the god we must not name, and the ancestors reside. Either a crossroads or a three-way fork is the 'point of no return' that separates our world from the supernatural world (AC 18). This is the place where two crocodiles separate us from the ancestors who live in the water (AC 14).

The Fon dwelling is a square compound that is surrounded by a fence of trees or branches and consists of several rectangular huts and a fireplace. Long palm leaves give shelter to a small terrace that is located in front of the entrance to the most important hut. The chief's dwelling has an *apatam*: a spacious round hut without sidewalls, covered with a roof of palm leaves (see 3.1.). A separate hut houses the **aséén**, the cone-shaped iron altars for the ancestors. This dwelling also comes back in the stories. Performers rarely provide us with detailed descriptions of the dwelling. Actually, they use the locations to indicate a change of the point of reference in the story, such as 'in the hut', 'in her room', 'at the market', and so forth. Some stories in the corpus mention the palace, a two-storey house that has a huge porch and a courtyard, for example AC 4. In brief, the setting of the stories is familiar to the audience.

On the other hand, the performers provide us with substantial details about life within the dwelling and give a recognisable and accurate picture of the Fon world. There is a lot of economic activity in and around the village. The inhabitants of the village earn a living with local crafts and trades, for example the blacksmith and the tailor figure in some of the stories. Several stories offer an extensive description of the markets where the saleswomen weekly take their trade, as they do in real life. The stories often mention the diviner and his consults.³⁶ The women at the market sell starchy staples, such as manioc, millet, maize, yam, and groundnuts and various beans. The women also prepare all kinds of fried snacks that they produce from groundnuts or beans that they flavour with some combination of the ubiquitous spices *pili-pili*, ginger and freshly chopped red peppers and its ground seeds (McCann 1988: 130ff.). The men sell livestock and fish. The hunters are familiar with the bush where they hunt for game and small animals like guinea pigs and even snails (AC 1; Mondjannagni 1977: 414).

Stories often mention daily utensils such as earthenware jars and cooking pots. The stories pay attention to childcare: mothers bath their children and dress them in clean shirts (AC 16). The stories provide specifications of the different types of clothing, like the loincloth or the **agbada**, the chief's large shoulder cloth, and the occasions where the various clothes are appropriate to wear. Performers sometimes specify the

³⁶ The Fon people have a week of four days that is copied from the Yoruba week; in the south of Benin the important markets take place at the traditional cycle of four days; (Mondjannagni 1977: 279).

musical instruments or the orchestra that contribute to a special occasion or feast (AC 10). Some stories emphasize the special apparel for an important celebration like the marriage of a king; the king offers his bride packages of wrappers, pearls and beads, powder and perfume (AC 4, A 4).³⁷ Some storytellers even give the names of specific birds and trees.³⁸ Actually, the stories provide us with a scene where men meet on an equal footing with gods, animals and plants. All creators and creatures behave and speak as human beings do. Animals and human beings journey from the village through the forest to the supernatural world to meet with the gods.

Verdier, who collected his corpus in Togo, confirmed my description of the decor of the Fongbe stories. He noted that the society and the social life in the stories resemble life in a rural West African village where the inhabitants keep themselves busy. Verdier observed that his corpus was set in the decor of a 'pays des contes', a country of tales. He called this country of tales a 'trompe l'oeil' landscape in which the forest or the marshlands separated the world from the supernatural world (Verdier 1973, I: 17). Verdier considered that the stories have two paradoxical forms; on the one hand, the story is a theatre where the storyteller performs, on the other hand, the story is a timeless asset of the expression of a culture (Verdier 1973, I: 20).

5.2. The central participant

One of the main features of the Fongbe **hwènùxó** is the occurrence of one single character instead of several protagonists or 'dramatis personae'. This character is the central participant who is the star actor of the story and plays the leading role. He is the driving force whose acts are decisive to solve the incident that haunts the developing story. The central participant uses direct speech in songs (see 11.1. and chapter 15).

The central participant has extraordinary, that is divine and supernatural properties, for he embodies the vital spirit **Sé**, who is a person's guardian spirit. The diviner worships his cult through the divination of **Fa**. The central participant has all kinds of religious devices that are associated with **Fa** and its religious rituals and symbols. **Sé** is the incarnation of the distant **Măwù**, the goddess 'Moon'.

³⁷ The King of **Danxomè** was called 'the king of pearls' since he had the monopoly to wear the pearls made from the excrements of the Snake god **Dan** (Le Hérisse 1911: 23).

³⁸ The Klikpo brothers named specific birds and trees. In Ayou 1 the prickly shrub is mentioned, in Ayou 7 the kapok tree or silk cotton tree (the genus *Ceiba pentandra* in the family *Malvaceae* that also includes the 'baobab' tree (genus *Adansonia*). The brothers also mentioned the African harrier hawk **gangan**.

On the other hand, on top of all this, the central participant has the sensory perception of a human being. He has a feeling for language, he speaks well-formed Fongbe, he has an eye for details, and he has a flair for business. The central participant only speaks when he is alone, or when he assumes that nobody can hear him. He acts like in the Fongbe proverb about the three monkeys: they hear and see anything that happens, but they keep silent. The central participant is the character who sometimes sings a song that gives the moral of the story at the denouement. The song resembles a chant by its rhythmic manner of presenting speech, which verges on recitation. I will describe the three aliases under which the central participant acts; he may impersonate a personal object, a deity or an animal.

The personal object

The central participant is often a personal object. The object may vary from a utensil as a saucepot to a piece of jewellery, for instance a ring. The owner of this object goes through terrible ordeals when it is mistreated. The object embodies the divine guardian spirit who protects his owner and punishes the culprit. In these stories, the objects become sacred objects or ‘fetishes’ that give shelter to a spirit or a god. The story states that either the object has an owner, or it reports the gift of the object by an unknown person. One of the stories mentions for example that, after the orphan saves the unknown man from a bushfire, the man gives a magic ring to the orphan. At the end of the story, the orphan must return the ring but he may keep his newly acquired wealth (AC 6).

Some stories depict the central participant as a number of objects that follow one after another. This happens in an Abomey-Calavi story that offers the following embodiments of the central participant: the first appearance is a lamb, the second presence shows a talisman, and the last materialization is a group of three objects: a rope, a fish basket, and a rod. These three objects together are the central participant who finally punishes the culprits (AC 3; see also 5.5.).

The transformation of a deity

The central participant of a number of stories is a deity who changes into a human being. The corpus has several stories in which a prickly shrub changes into a beautiful girl (Ay 1, AC 10). There is a story about an antelope that changes into a beautiful girl, and there is a story about a blueberry shrub that changes into a girl and a horse (A 2, AC 8). The shrub refers to the earth god **Sakpata** who gives the rain, the gift of fertility as well as the plague of smallpox. Notice that, in general, the Fon people do not mention the names of their gods.³⁹

In the corpus, twins embody gods. This reflects the belief of the Fon people that considers twins as deities who also have a special cult. In two stories from Abomey-Calavi, the central participant is a two-faced deity.⁴⁰ One example of the corpus shows a central participant who takes the better half: the **hǒxò**, ‘twins’ **Zinsù** and **Sagbò** (AC 19).⁴¹ The beginning of the story once mentions the name of one of the twins. This is the name of the reckless **Sagbò**, whose absence nearly costs his twin his life. In this story, these two deities resemble the hermaphrodite twin gods **Sakpata** and **Xevìsù**. The last one is the god Sky, who is jealous of his twin, the god Earth. This story reminds us that gods are like human beings, who, at their turn, resemble animals. De Souza mentioned that animals are considered divine spirits that are incarnated in tangible bodies (De Souza 1975: 19).⁴²

Gods also change into animals. In a story about the gods **sùn** ‘Moon’ and **hwè** ‘Sun’, the god Sun throws his children in the lagoon, and they change into fishes. This story explains the origin of the lunar eclipse (AC 17). Le Hérisse and Maupoil also published this story (Le Hérisse 1911: 257ff., Maupoil 1988: 574ff.). Verdier published a version of this story in the Mina language (Anecho) (Verdier 1973, II: 181).

Gods can also change into two friends. Let us consider the story from Abomey-Calavi about the two **xòntón**, ‘friends’, **Nǔvènumì** and **Nǔvènumiã**, ‘Anything-makes-me-angry’ and ‘Nothing-makes-me-angry’ (AC 5). The names of the friends express their nature. This story is about power and prosperity, and provides us with a fine example of the different roles of the gods and the use of their properties in the stories. The friends have opposite properties that make them friends. This bipolar central participant refers to the ambiguous competence of the god **Lègbà**, the

³⁹ In the stories about the creation of the world, the performers named the name of their gods (Ay 2, AC 17).

⁴⁰ Fon statuettes of gods often show gods that have two heads; gods are able to look behind.

⁴¹ The Fongbe word used to indicate the twin here is the English ‘Guenon monkey’, in French ‘cercopithèque’.

⁴² **Sagbò** already joined the ancestors, for the performer told that he stayed in the forest, which meant that he was dead.

youngest son of the **Mǎwu-Lisà** pantheon, who is the linguist of the gods, as well as the god who protects the markets, but is also a troublemaker. One of the properties of the friendly young man in this story refers to **Lěgbà** as the great communicator, for he never gets angry, and he speaks the language of the birds, and the languages of the **Aja** ‘West’ and the **Ayo** ‘East’. He heals both the king of the West and the king of the East. The first one is the king of **Aja**, who is blind, which is a property of the god **Xevìsù**. His opponent, the king of **Ayo**, has a hunchback, which is a property of the god **Sakpata**. The king of **Aja** rewards **Nǔvènumiǎ**, ‘Nothing makes me angry’, with the rights of the markets of **Aja**, and he becomes the king’s linguist. This function was a much sought-after position in West Africa. Yankah described the prominence of the king’s linguist in his publication about the Akan of Ghana (Yankah 1995: 212). The friendly **Nǔvènumiǎ** triumphs over the angry man **Nǔvènumì** who dies at the end of the story.⁴³

The trickster

The trickster is an extraordinary central participant. He is an exceptional character: he is neither divine nor human, though he succeeds in journeying from the earth to the sky where the ancestors live. The trickster in the corpus often is **Adɔnɔ Yegbó** or **Yɔgbó**. The stories show that the trickster is a living being, for he is said to eat a lot. On the other hand, it is impossible to kill him. He is often sent away, but to no effect, for he will always return to achieve more acts of deceit and deception. The performers give no description of the looks of the trickster. They drop several hints that he is an animal indeed. This reminds us of the Fon habit that one does not openly say a person’s name, but a person’s status, for example ‘the wife of **Kɔjo**’.⁴⁴ The performers hint that the trickster is a spider in three out of six **Yɔgbó**-stories in the corpus. In the first story, the trickster is in the room of **Dada Ségbó**, the Great Spirit who is one of the agents. There, he furtively watches **Dada Ségbó** who hides three objects for a contest to marry off his daughters, and later he lets his stepbrother in on the secret in order to let him win the contest (Ay 2). This indicates that one does not notice **Yɔgbó**, for he is small. The performer calls him **Adɔnɔ**, ‘the web’s owner’, which the language consultant used to translate into ‘the glutton’ or ‘the lover of nice food’ (see 14.1.).

In a second story, a boasting **Yɔgbó** wins a contest in the sky by jumping over the rope that separates the sky from the earth. However, this time the elders succeed in

⁴³ The stereotyped pair of the two friends **Nǔvènumì** and **Nǔvènumiǎ** reminds us also of Azuonye’s description of the representation of kings in Igbo tales; they are pictured on the one hand as the legitimate authority and on the other as the abuse of power (Azuonye 1995: 65-82).

⁴⁴ **Kɔjo** is the name of a boy who is born on a Monday.

cheating on him, and so he falls from the sky out of the House of Rain. The fall crashes the trickster, and his web spread all over the bush ‘and his web scattered everywhere on the trees, on all the branches, spread over the whole world’ (Ay 3).

The third story refers to the trickster as the ‘the large fat belly’ (Ay 4). Segurola described the trickster as a mythical, gluttonous and immortal being. He is well-known for his tricks, deception, ingratitude and insatiability (Segurola 1968, II: 620). The dictionary also mentions the synonymy of *yè* for *yègletete*, meaning ‘spider’ (Segurola 1968, II: 615). The surnames also indicate that the Fongbe **Yògbó** is indeed the counterpart of the spider **Yiyi**, the Ewegbe trickster (Konrad 1994).⁴⁵

The corpus presents two comic trickster stories that show that **Yògbó** is not the only Fon trickster. Both stories stage a small animal as central participant. A Fongbe proverb says that a small thing is capable of disturbing many things, meaning that the size of an animal is opposite to the intelligence of its behaviour. A small animal is said to be smart, cunning and secretive, and able to survive a much bigger adversary. Tricksters may be also part of a household, as shows the Youngest Cat (Ay 5) and the Rooster (Ay 6).

It is remarkable that two authors alleged that the Fon people have a trickster-god, which is **Lěgbà**. Herskovits even mentioned that **Lěgbà** is not the only Dahomean trickster, “we also have Yo” (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 101). Pelton called **Lěgbà** the Fongbe counterpart of the well-known spider **Anansé**, who once travelled from Ghana to Surinam to become Anansi (Pelton 1980: 113ff. and 223ff.; Voorhoeve 1979: 7). It is clear that both **Lěgbà** and **Yògbó** have in common that they are capable of travelling between the sky and the earth, and vice-versa. However, there is a salient difference. **Lěgbà** is a god, he is the youngest son of the gods of the **Mǎwǔ-Lisà** pantheon, and he is the linguist of all the gods as well as the god who protects the Fon markets in front of which his statue with the characteristic erect penis stands (De Souza 1975: 55). The corpus has no allusions to any sexual interest of the trickster **Yògbó**; his interest is in getting food, getting it effortlessly, and getting it in considerable amounts. This calls to mind a spider’s web indeed. The claim of both Herskovits and Pelton, which states that the Fon people have a trickster-god **Lěgbà** is not borne out of my data. On the contrary, one of the stories of the corpus relates how **Yògbó** and his greediness made the elders angry; they expelled him forever from the Land of Sky, the habitat of the ancestors (Ay 3).

⁴⁵ Guédou described him as ‘the shadow’. See 14.1.

5.3. Agents

Let us consider the role of the agents. Performers stage them as roles, not as characters. Agents have no face, no age, no opinions and no emotions. Agents impersonate a function: they do not come to life. They have properties that fit their functions, which stem from the institutions of the Kingdom of **Danxomè**. The agents in the corpus have a few basic features that resemble the stereotyped players in the Italian 16th century's 'commedia dell'arte', and the puppets in a Mr. Punch and Judy show. The actors in the 'commedia dell'arte' wear masks and clothes that make clear who they are supposed to be. The resemblance as well as the difference with the Fon agents is clear.

When we observe the agents and their actions, they merely serve to accomplish contrary actions. All stories cast two agents; agent A represents the good one and agent B represents the bad one. They are like two sides of a coin; they illustrate the topic of the story. The performer exposes each of the agents alternately; the performer does not stage them together until the denouement. An action that involves Agent B can take place at Agent's A's place, while Agent A is absent (see Greimas 1966 (b): 172ff.).

Agents always come in pairs, which reflects the duality that I discussed in the description of the kingdom and the pantheons (see 1.2. and 1.3.). One does the right thing and the other one violates the inhibitions. They disclose behaviour and misbehaviour, and finally they symbolize life and death. They are direct opposites and incompatible. They have one thing in common: they all speak Fongbe. However, they speak reported speech (see p.154).

Humans become animals and vice versa. Animals are also casted as powerful agents, for example, the leopard and the cat are stand-ins for powerful people. The part of the ugly one is for **kpɔ̀**, 'leopard', who is the symbol of the King of **Danxomè**. Her stepsister who has the same father is **awii** 'cat'. She plays the good person in the role of the traditional doctor (Ay 5, AC 16, A 7).

Gods change temporarily to humans or animals to warn against the violation of a taboo. This happens for example in the story about the poor man who only knows how to cut hoes. The god **Dan**, 'Snake', makes the pauper a wealthy man, but he takes back all his possessions from him when the man forgets the obligatory sacrifices (AC 8). Gods may change temporarily into human beings, but human beings cannot change into gods. The agents embody also ancestors to emphasize their support of the living, for example the orphans in the corpus (AC 6, AC 14).

There are three distinct types of agents: the kings, the monsters and the common agents that work in trade and crafts.

Kings and their antagonists

The Great Spirit king

The stories sometimes present the god **Dada Ségbó** as a king. He is the main ancestor, the Great Spirit, who created the universe according to the oldest Fon pantheon. He keeps himself far away from this world. The Fon consider him a wise man that is capable doing justice. He also consults **Fa** (AC 4, A 4), and the trickster cannot deceive him (Ay 2). He is an example to men. He has no enemies. The performers picture him as the antagonist of the powerful worldly king who he never meets in the stories.

The worldly king

Several stories feature a worldly king who is the chief: the **tomèxósu**, ‘ruler of the country’. He is the most distinguished agent who holds a high function that has its original base in history. The **toxósu** is moulded on the former rulers of **Danxomè**. He represented the highest position in the kingdom, and his arrogance and cruelty were greatly feared. The king had a divine status, for he was the only one who decided whether people lived or died. The king never addressed himself to the people; he had a linguist who conveyed the king’s message (see 1.2. and 6.2.).

The king makes his authority visible by sending his messengers on a special assignment: **wenzagun**, the ‘halfheads’, whose right half of their heads was shaved (Argyle 1966: 68). They are in charge to bring presents to the future bride of the king (AC 4), and they are the ones to negotiate the damages for abducting the spouse of the bodiless spirit hunter (AC 10).

The worldly king has to face two distinct agents that may function as his opponents: the hunter or the orphan. The hunter and the orphan never figure in the same story; they apparently exclude each other. The hunter and the orphan are both powerful agents for they are not sedentary, as the king is. Their journeys give them an independent existence. The hunter travels in the forest amongst the gods, and the orphan is a frequent visitor of the ancestors in the lagoon (see chapter 6). The corpus figures them in several stories where they fight for justice and always win. The hunter **Albviđogudo**, ‘Little Finger’, is in touch with the gods. His reward is the shrub that turns into a beautiful girl. When the king kidnaps the girl, Little Finger discloses the secret and the girl becomes a shrub again (Ay 1, A 2).

The other opponent of the king is the orphan. **Nđeyóví Tđeyóví** is the orphan who has neither mother nor father. His self-confidence is extraordinary, and he is capable of journeying on his own. Two kings try to deceive him, but they have to admit defeat (AC 6). The hunter’s conflict is about to go through a lot of trouble to have sex. The orphan’s conflict is about to waste one’s time and effort to get food and to survive.

Monsters

Two of the stories in the corpus stage a visible evil agent, which is the monster **Yehwe Zogbannɔ**. The **Yehwe Zogbannɔ** meaning ‘priest with 30 horns’ is a child-eating monster that lives in the bush. He has one horn on his head at his first appearance in a story. Then, his brother appears with two horns, followed by another brother with three horns, and so on (AC 7). In a different story, the **Yehwe Zogbannɔ** threatens the twin **Zinsu** by popping up and showing off his 30 horns. The twin sees how the monster eats and is frightened, for the monster not only is able to separate his head from his trunk, but he also puts his hands and his legs aside before he feeds his limbs one by one. The twin politely addresses the monster as ‘Sir’ (AC 19). In Fongbe, the monster is called **kanlin**, ‘animal’. There are male and female monsters. One female monster is pregnant and therefore the hunter does not kill her, which means that the monsters will always be amongst us (AC 19). Performers tell these stories in a light-hearted way and especially to children.

The corpus also shows a girl whose hands and feet are chopped off, as the penalty for being the only child of her mother. She is left to her fate at the three-forked road (see p. 72). This girl is a **Dobligodo** girl. She is a monster, for she feeds on stolen raw beans (AC 18). This agent relates to the **Dobligodo** people whom Maupoil mentioned. These monsters were also able to separate their head, arms and legs from their trunk at their pleasure. The men were famous for stealing girls to eat them⁴⁶. Maupoil stated that the **Dobligodo** were a mythical people that originally stemmed from the Yoruba storytelling tradition. Maupoil boldly claimed that these stories traveled to the Nago in the East of Benin, and from there on migrated to Haiti. (Maupoil 1988: 610ff.). In my view, this statement is not substantiated, for there is no base of evidence to support this claim.

⁴⁶ This brings to mind the habits of the **Yehwe Zogbannɔ** (See AC 7 for the ambition of eating girls, and AC 19 for the separation of limbs from the trunk).

The common agents

The common agents in the stories are a mix of tradition and modernity that reflects real life. Common agents are the rural and urban Fon people in the trade and crafts who have to work for a living. On the one hand, the blacksmiths set up shops in the villages. The musicians go from village to town, and viceversa, to any place where their trade is welcome. The stories also report on the town market, where fishmongers and butchers sell their goods and where tailors are sewing shirts. Here, there are many costermongers and street-sellers: women who sell food, spices, herbs and vegetables, as well as fried snacks. Women who play a role inside the house are also staged as common agents. Examples are the co-wives (the first wife and the new wife) or the adulterous wife (AC 2, A 5, AC 4, A 4, A 8).

Common agents beseech the diviner to consult the oracle **Fa**. Deities can change into common agents that have tangible bodies. Several gods in the corpus embody the artisans of real life. The goddess **Mǎwǔ** for example is the divine goldsmith. She is the godmother of the blacksmiths; she is the one who uses gold to forge a child for a childless mother, or a vagina for the boy who wants to be a girl (A 1, AC 4).⁴⁷ The hunter of several stories personifies the iron war deity **Gũ**, who also appears as a blacksmith in one story (Ay 1, AC 10 AC 5). The rainmaker and the fire lighter embody **Sakpata** and **Xeviosù** (AC 6).

5.4. The principle of duality

One of the main features of the culture of the kingdom was the often described principle of duality in religion and the royal administration (Argyle 1966: 76, and chapter 1). I will confine to the issues that are relevant to the stories: the occurrence of complementary opposite pairs and the dualism that goes with these pairs, the frequent enmity between siblings, and the belief in divine and magical power.

The principle of duality is part of the rural Fon society. It is therefore not surprising that the agents in Fongbe stories come mostly in pairs. All agents, whether they are human beings, gods or animals, exhibit the principle of duality in one way or the other. Performers picture animals as a pair, for example in the texts about the cat and her stepsister, the leopard. The two friends, the two co-wives and the twins represent a two-faced person that has one face that is bestowed with virtues, while the second face is pictured as a wicked one. Agent A is the victim, and Agent B is the offender.

This goes also for the hunter ‘Little Finger’ who speaks with animals, and is capable of realizing metamorphoses. Little Finger only seems to be an easy victim of the

⁴⁷ In the corpus **Mǎwǔ** exclusively sculptures golden objects. Several authors mentioned that **Mǎwǔ** uses clay to shape human beings.

king's deceit, but he breaks his promise of keeping the secret by informing his first wife about the identity of the second wife. The first wife sings a song that reveals that the king's new wife is a shrub. Therewith she violates the taboo that one must keep secrets and Little Finger defeats the other agent, the King (Ay 1, AC 11, and A 2).

Let us consider the similar texts of Abomey-Calavi and Abomey about 'The sadist co-wife' that are a typical example of duality (AC 2, A 5). The first wife is jealous of the new wife who cooks delicious spicy sauces. When the new wife goes to the market, the first wife enters the hut of the other woman, eats from her sauce and defecates in it. This behaviour continues for some time, and the new wife becomes desperate, because she has to throw away the filthy sauce, and to cook a new sauce. She complains to her husband who remains indifferent to what is going on. Finally, the new wife decides to put magical glue on the rim of the saucepot. The first wife is caught with the saucepot sticking to her buttocks. She denies her misbehaviour, but the facts prove her wrong.

Eco proposed a structuralist analysis of a story. This kind of analysis provides us with contrastive roles and actions of the two agents, A, the good one, and B, the bad one (Eco 1966: 79). The contrastive pairs of roles and actions that occur in both texts are the following:

Agent A	Agent B
The new wife	The first wife
Goes to the market	Stays at home
Sells	Idle
Cooking	Stealing
Creative	Destructive
Lives	Disappears

The list clearly shows the duality of the pair of agents. The principle of duality was already ingrained in the Kingdom of **Danxomè** and in its religious pantheon. This principle of duality is still present in all Fongbe **hwènùxó**.

5.5. Religious devices

I will describe the symbols that refer to gods and ancestors, before embarking on the role of divination. All stories allude to the gods and their miracles and gifts to humanity. They also refer to religious devices and the important role of divination. The stories reflect the divine devices that are important in the Fon society. The cults emphasize the frequent contact between human beings, the gods and the ancestors. The stories report the exploits of the various gods and their *gris-gris*, and make them look as a part of the actual world.

The stories praise the power of the gods and spirits, without naming them. Instead of naming them, stories only mention the name of the place where a spirit may stay.⁴⁸ Recall that an iroko tree does not impersonate a spirit. A spirit may use the iroko as a shelter from time to time. Therefore, one must protect the iroko trees. It means that the stories have often an underlying meaning that is only understandable if one knows the meaning of the symbols that are used.

On the other hand, in the case of creation or production, performers name the name of gods. The Fon people consider the **vodun** ‘gods’ as spirits that gave many gifts to humanity. One of the stories of the corpus reports the creation of fish. **Hwè**, the god Sun, kills his children by throwing them in the sea. They turn into **hweví**, ‘fishes’, literally meaning ‘children of **Hwè**’. This is how the god Sun gave us food (AC 17). Gods give wealth, but they also may take it back. Therefore, performers emphasize the importance of respecting the annual ceremonies (AC 3). A second story tells the great anger of **Dan**, ‘Snake’, the founder of the kingdom, towards an act of sacrilege such as the neglect of the obligatory sacrifices (AC 8).

Fon religion gives the ancestors or ‘ethnic deities’ also an important role (Mondjannagni 1977: 123). The **tóxwýó**, ‘ancestor **vodun**’, are the ghosts that are celebrated in the ‘ceremony of the ghosts’. This cult has individual **aséén**, ‘portable iron altars’ that serve to venerate them (see chapter 3). The elders had a prominent role in chasing the trickster from the Country of Sky (Ay 3). One story relates to the foundation of the **Adanhunsa** market in Allada by King **Adjahuto**, one of the **hěnnuvodun**, the famous royal ancestor and founder of the kingdom (AC 13). The name of **Adanhunsa** means ‘anger at the foot of the kapok tree’, which calls in mind **Adjahuto**’s reported anger at his arrival in Allada (AC 13; Mondjannagni 1977: 277). The names of the rural markets in Benin often differ from the villages where they are set up to remind us of the past.

Markets are the places to encounter ancestors. This is the case in a trickster story (Ay 4), and in an orphan story (AC 14). The intersection of two roads has an identical function. The orphan decides to make a journey to his deceased mother, for

⁴⁸ Fon people use to refer to a function or a state instead of using names (see p. 76).

he suffers ill treatment by his stepmother, the new wife of his father. He passes three crossroads to join his ancestor. He successively encounters an old woman, two fighting stones, and an old woman with a crocodile. Finally, he encounters a lonely jar with cooked rice. All these items symbolize death, meaning that the orphan has to face death before he may find his mother (AC 14).

In 1976, in spite of the inhibition of religion, the Fon people still consulted the diviner in order to solve a problem (De Souza 1975: 88). The corpus reflects also the tangible role of the oracle **Fa** and the **bokónḽ**, ‘the diviner’ who consults **Fa**.⁴⁹ The world of Fongbe verbal art emphasizes the authority of the **bokónḽ** who is capable of connecting to the supernatural world in order to consult the oracle **Fa**. He consults **Fa** to get to know the help of the **Sé**, ‘the guardian spirit’ of an individual person. Maupoil extensively described the interpretation of **Fa** and its **dù**, ‘signs’ (Maupoil 1988).

The role of the guardian spirit **Sé** is crucial in the stories, for this vital spirit helps to turn around the misfortune of the good agent. The central participant often uses the devices given by **Sé** to accelerate the denouement. The use of devices is twofold: to get support from the gods to solve the problem, and to entail the penalty for the violation of a taboo. The devices **bõ**, ‘gris-gris’ or ‘juju’, vary in appearance. There is **awḽn**, ‘glue’, if the plot of the story so requires (AC 2, A 5). A second example is **Dosu** who is as poor as a leper and successively receives a sheep **gbõ**, a talisman **bõcyó**, and then the trio of the **kàn**, ‘rope’, the **akakó**, ‘fish basket made from the leaves of a coconut tree’, and the **bǎ**, ‘rod’ (AC 3).

Let us consider the role of the guardian spirit in one of the stories from Abomey-Calavi, ‘The day to thresh the millet’ (AC 4). Le Hérisse published a similar story (Le Hérisse 1911: 266ff.). The central participant in this story is the fiancée of **Dada Ségbó**, the ‘Great Spirit’ ancestor who is the oldest god who created the world. There is a problem, for the bride-to-be is a boy. The boy and **Dada Ségbó** consult together the diviner to ask how they must cope with the slanderous talking of the first wife. They also want to know how they must deal with the most important ritual of the year, the threshing of the millet. The bride has to participate in this ritual where everyone is naked. The diviner tells them to offer the following sacrifices to **Sé**: 41 pieces of **wḽ**, ‘red porridge,’ and 41 cuts of white chicken meat.⁵⁰ These sacrifices will enable them to meet with the guardian spirit. **Sé** agrees to change the boy into a girl, and goddess **Mǎwũ** forges a golden vagina. The goddess has a good sense of humour, and comments that she originally intended the boy to be a woman, while he himself preferred to be a man. Obviously due to circumstances, he changed his mind, but this will cost him dearly. The boy becomes a girl indeed, and she

⁴⁹ Fa originally stems from the Yoruba Ifa cult.

⁵⁰ Note that the number 41 indicates **Lisà** the god Sun.

definitely is the girl that she was meant to be (AC 4: 153-159). The story clearly illustrates the necessity to consult the guardian spirit **Sé**, for even **Dada Ségbó**, the Great Spirit ancestor, has to consult the diviner. The story illustrates also the fact that the performers picture a number of deities in the Fon pantheon as hermaphrodites.⁵¹

Fa uses specific numbers as religious symbols that play a crucial role in the stories as well. The numbers from the **Fa** divination indicate a sacrifice or a sacred gesture. The stories often mention the number 16, that is the number of the 16 great signs of **Fa** (Maupoil 1988: 430, 646). This is the number for the sacrifices of calabashes, pigeons, chickens, and balls of porridge, bottles with palm oil, and bottles with alcohol (Maupoil 1988: 615, 651). It is the number of wealth: 16 bags of money (Maupoil 1988: 623). Fate is indicated with the number 256, meaning 16 x 16, meaning all the **Fa** there are, **Fa dù: hùn afɔ̀tɔ̀n nukún ɔ̀okpó**. The number 41, in Fongbe **kandɛ̀ nùkun ɔ̀okpó**, sometimes occurs as **kandɛ̀ nùkun lisà** referring to the god Sun **Lisà**, the male counterpart of the distant goddess Moon **Máwũ** (A 4).⁵²

Maupoil described the sixteen major **Fa**. The **Fa** signs come in pairs, the first one is male and the second one is female, and so on. Maupoil mentioned that the diviners disagree about the sex of the second sign.⁵³ The 240 minor **Fa**, called **Favi**, ‘the children of **Fa**’, complete the list of 256 **Fa**. Some of the signs are so dangerous that the Fon diviners warn against mentioning them: **yíǎ**, ‘call’. This would bring bad luck (Maupoil 1988: 412).

Each **Fa** has a number of maxims or mottos, and a number of stories that go with it. Maupoil calls these stories ‘legends’. Maupoil noted that the number of mottos and stories are countless. Each of the major **Fa** has a taboo or interdiction, and stipulates sacrifices (Maupoil 1988: 419ff.). The list of the appearances of **Fa** in the stories of the corpus is impressive. I will give an overview of the incarnations of **Fa** that is based on the publications by Maupoil and Le Hérisse.

⁵¹ The Calavi version in the corpus is similar to the French version published by Le Hérisse, and entitled ‘Conte grivois’ meaning ‘bawdy tale’ (AC 4; Le Hérisse 1911: 266-270). Paulme analysed Le Hérisse’s translation, and described the central participant as a transvestite boy (Paulme 1976: 70ff.). This analysis is erroneous in my view, for the Fongbe story of the corpus gives a clue neither to a transvestite boy nor to an egotist king who wants to marry a younger person, as Paulme suggested. It is probable that neither Paulme nor Le Hérisse knew that Fon people venerated a number of hermaphrodite deities.

⁵² The principal deities of the Nagogbe (Yoruba) **Kenesi**, the ‘black magic deities’, are also indicated with the number 41 (Maupoil 1988: 20).

⁵³ Maupoil appears to be correct. The descriptions of the sign indicate that the first sign represents the East, that is the goddess **Máwũ**. The second sign represents the god **Lisà** and the West. The Yoruba pantheon and its contrary representation probably caused the confusion of the points of the compass.

The first sign is the sign of life. One of the incarnations of the first sign is **ajinaku**, ‘elephant’. He appears in the story with the bigmouth rooster or the bigmouth bird **titigotin**. The bird makes the gathered crowd believe that he killed the elephant; the meaning is that a small thing may cause a lot of trouble. The colour of this sign is white (see Ay 6 and Maupoil 1988: 437). The elephant is also an incarnation of the eleventh sign, the sign of the Snake god **Dan** (Maupoil 1988: 526).

Ye, ‘divine spirit’, is the incarnation of the second sign and represents the god **Lisà** ‘Sun’ who gave fish to men (AC 17). This is the sign of death. Note that the sculptors of **vodun** statuettes often give their wooden figures two heads. **Ye** is the potential double, the two-headed figure that symbolises death. Gods of this sign are also **Dan** and **Sakpata**. The colour is black (AC 10, AC 17, Maupoil 1988: 444ff.).

The third sign represents the vicious animals such as the lion **kinikini** and the hyena **xlà**. These animals relate to the **aséén**, ‘the altar of the ancestors and the **vodun** of all recipes and medicaments’ (Ay 4, A 6; Maupoil 1988: 453ff., 618ff.; Le Hérisse 1911: 265ff.). The colour is brownish red.

The fourth sign represents the thighs and the genitals of a woman, the impurity of women and childbirth. The colour is black (AC 1, AC 2, A 5, AC 19; Maupoil 1988: 460ff.). One of the incarnations of this sign is the **hǒxò**, ‘twins’, **Zinsu** and **Sagbo**, and the monkeys that the Fon people consider the twins of mankind (AC 19; Maupoil 1988: 435, 462, 493, Le Hérisse 1911: 234).⁵⁴

The fifth sign is a dangerous sign that involves misery, blood and fire. The favourite colour is red. The sign reminds us of the obligation to sacrifice to the gods. Several stories describe fire as a gift of the gods; the performers refer to **myò**, ‘fire’ or ‘ember’, and **nakí**, ‘firewood’, that one encounters in the forest (Ay 4, AC 6, AC 14, AC 19). The gods of this sign are amongst others the fire god **Xeviosù** and the iron god **Gũ** (AC 5, AC 6; Maupoil 1988: 469).

The sixth sign is one of the most dangerous signs of **Fa**. The sign is the second-in-command of the sign of death during the night and represents the first sign of life during the day. The god is **Sakpata** (Maupoil 1988: 473 ff.). This sign concerns the stories about **kpò**, ‘the leopard’ (Ay 5, Ay 7, AC 16, A 7; Maupoil 1988: 477ff.). The interdictions concern amongst others the food of **Sakpata**: **nu mime**, grilled plates (Ay 5, AC 16, A 7).

The seventh sign represents the rope **kan**. The gods of this sign are the Snake god **Dan**, the Sun god **Lisà**, and the twins **hǒxò**. The colour is blue. This sign embodies stories about the Muslims who came to the world to steal from the fields of **Fa**

⁵⁴ Recent research pointed out that Benin has the highest number of twins in the world. There are 28 twins born out of every 1 000 births (Smits and Monden 2011).

(Maupoil 1988: 488). A Muslim restaurant owner figures in one of the stories of the corpus, **manèlènù** meaning ‘man from Mali’, that is ‘Muslim’, or ‘dervish’ (AC 3). It appears to me that the sign refers to the practice of the **vodun** cult, where shaped sculptures represent the gods. These sculptures show limbs that are tied with many ropes to manage evil. In a more worldly meaning, the rope refers to the slaves, **kannumɔ**, ‘captives’. The stealing Muslims are also the Yoruba who within living memory competed with the Fon when it came to loot and sell human beings. One of the stories of the corpus mentions their king, the King of **Ayɔ** (AC 5). Maupoil expressed his doubts about the meaning of this sign (Maupoil 1988: 482).

The eighth sign represents the hunter who is the chief of the twins who themselves are the mystery of life. The taboos concern the eating of monkeys and the tying up of a bundle of firewood (Ay 1, AC 1, AC 11, AC 19, A 8; Maupoil 1988: 492).

The ninth sign is a dangerous sign that represents iron and fire, and the gods **Gũ** and **Xeviosù**. The sign refers to the penis, sperm and erection (AC 9; Maupoil 1988: 499ff.).

The tenth sign represents the black magic and **awii**, the cat. It symbolises the female demons that hide in a calabash that has the form of a crescent moon. This sign rules the two ears, the two sides of the nose, the eyes, the lips, the thighs, the legs and the feet. The main colour is red (Ay 5, AC 16, A 7, AC 5, AC 6, A 3; Maupoil 1988: 508ff.).

The eleventh sign represents the snake, including the venomous **amanyɔnu**. This sign rules the bush and its animals. It is also one of the most dangerous signs, and it is supposed to kill children (A 1, A 3; Maupoil 1988: 524ff.).

The twelfth sign represents pregnancy, abortion, and the god of the twins. Gods are **Sakpata**, **Gũ**, **Xeviosù**, **hǒxò** and **kpò**, ‘leopard’. The favourite colour is red (AC 19; Maupoil 1988: 530ff.).

The thirteenth sign represents somebody who talks too much, like **Lěgbà**. Several consultants told Maupoil that the sign symbolised Muslims, as well as the white men and women. The sign is reminiscent of people who wear a skirt and a jacket (Maupoil 1988: 536ff.).

The fourteenth sign represents the sky and the earth, the gods **Lisà** and **Sakpata**. The colours are white, blue and red (Ay 3; Maupoil 1988: 546).

The fifteenth sign is again one of the most dangerous signs of **Fa**. It represents incest and illnesses. The god is **Sakpata**. However, in spite of the bad omens, the sign promises also wealth and a long life (AC 3; Maupoil 1988: 553).

The sixteenth sign is a mysterious and dangerous sign as well. One of the stories in Ayou refers to the sixteenth sign **Fu** (Ay 6). It is the sign of the sorcerers and the

birds who are sorcerers. One of the incarnations is **agbalin**, ‘the antelope that is capable of escaping death’ (Ay 1, AC 10, A 2; Maupoil 1988: 39, 571).

The dangerous signs have a common taboo: **lǒ**, ‘the crocodile’ (AC 14, Maupoil 1988: 41). The Fon people believe that the deceased journey to the ancestors in a carriage that two crocodiles pull (Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain: 2011). The diviner uses **děsunvǐ**, ‘kernels of the fruit of a palm tree’, to consult **Fa** (AC 4, A 4, AC 9; Maupoil 1988: 41). The good and bad omens are called **kpǒli**, ‘the sign of the forest’ or ‘the sign of the soul’, or ‘the sachet’ (AC 14; Maupoil 1988: 319).

The most important ritual of the Fon people is **li so** ‘the threshing of the millet’ (AC 4, A 4; Maupoil 1988: 357). The misery of **Dosu gudunǒ**, ‘the leper Dosu’, is well-known (AC 3; Maupoil 1988: 622). Fon people make fun of **segbǒ**, ‘the billy goat’, that is the sacrificial ram; he has a beard as the Muslims have (AC 3, A 6; Maupoil 1988: 629). Kings do not speak in public, they convey a message like **Dada Ségbó** does by gesturing his **azǒkwε koko**, ‘the earthen pipe’ (AC 3; Maupoil 1988: 641). The bush is dangerous, but it is also sacred: **zunmε**, ‘the sacred forest’ (Ay 1, Ay 8, AC 6, AC 7, AC 10, AC 19, A 2; Maupoil 1988: 623; Le Hérissé 1911: 234). Furthermore there are the countries of the Adja and the Yoruba: **Aja** and **Ayǒ** (AC 5; Maupoil 1988: 625, 632). Finally, yet importantly, there is **Lěgbà**, the linguist of the gods and humankind, as well as the helper of **Fa** and the guardian of markets and trade. His symbol is red clay, and the statue of his erect penis is all over the villages in the south of Benin. The rooster in Ayou 6 in the corpus incarnates him.

The **bǒcyǒ**, ‘statuettes’, that picture the features of the **vodun** gods show many of the symbols of the **Fa** divination. These features are often used in the stories of the corpus, for example **hùnjén**, ‘nails’, in Abomey-Calavi 4, or **kàn**, ‘rope’, that figures in several stories.

6. Topics: power and violations

The Fongbe **hwènùxó** has three main topics: power, conflicts and taboos. The topic of power is elaborated in the divine power of the gods and the functional power of the powerful of the earth, the kings and the chiefs. The second topic is about conflicts of abundance, food and sex or the lack of one of these. The third topic concerns the sacral duties and the violation of taboos.

6.1. The topic of power

The corpus shows many examples that present the issue of power. The stories elaborate on the topic of power. It is obvious that the power of the gods is involved in this topic as well, since the stories refer to the kingdom, its religion and traditions. The central participant is the incarnation of a god that is embodied in a character that is a utensil, an animal or a human being. The central participant uses his divine or supernatural power to break the worldly power of Agent B and to stop the conflict with Agent A. I described the religious (supernatural) power in depth in the previous chapter. Here, I will describe the functional power that divides the agents. Kings abuse their absolute power. On the other hand, a hunter or an orphan are smarter than the king, for they are survivors. The behaviour of the agents reminds us of the fixed position of the ministers in the kingdom. The ones that sat at the king's right were 'wise' men; those on the left were 'powerful' men (see also A 4: 153, 155, AC 16: 16 and p. 18).

Deceit and deception are a common practice in the stories. Deceit manifests itself by lies. Deception shows trickery or fraud. The most powerful human agent of the stories is the **tomèxósu**, 'chief of the country'. A number of stories presents the king or chief and describes the unequal relation between the powerful chief and the marginal commoner. Several stories figure human agents and their conflicts about theft, food and sex. In the trickster stories, the topics are similar, but the approach differs: **Yògbó** challenges the powerful agents, whether they are gods or ancestors, by deceiving them, and he often gets away with it.

6.2. The power of the powerful

Performers convey the notion of power in many ways. Let us consider the following fragment from a story from Ayou (Ay 2):

‘After that answer
His Majesty the king,
took the pipe from his mouth
and smiled with ease.

And he looked the winner, the new heir to the throne, straight in the eyes.
 And the shot of the gun went Bang!
 Bang! Bang!
 And three shots were fired.
 And the crowd started to cheer, tapping their fingers on their mouths.⁵⁵

After this happened,
 one hit the drum and one started to play the drums,
 and the celebration began, and they started the celebration.⁷

The fragment shows that **Dada Ségbó**, the Great Spirit, does not speak, but gives a signal by taking the pipe from his mouth, before he smiles and looks the new heir to the throne straight in the eyes. The king shows off his power by gestures. Verdier described similar scenes in Togolese stories: the heir to the throne had to win a contest to establish his high position (Verdier 1973, I: 42). The scene relates to the prerogative of the King of **Danxomè** to choose the heir to the throne, for succession was not a birthright. Quite the contrary, the heir to the throne had to put all his efforts into seizing the sceptre (see 1.2.).

In several stories, the performers stereotypically contrast a marginal central participant with a pair of powerful agents to characterize the relations of power. Here, the qualitative ‘powerful’ has two meanings. On the one hand, it denotes the tacit properties of Agent A that make him survive; on the other hand, it stands for the power behind the throne, which is the influence of Agent B.

Eco designed a general framework to describe the combination of characters in Fleming’s James Bond thrillers (Eco 1966: 79ff.). Eco’s technique nicely demonstrates what Bauman calls the ‘way of speaking’. This technique is helpful to capture the contrasts between Agent A and Agent B in the dramatic stories. The Agent A of these stories is an ancestor or invisible being who has little possessions, such as the orphan, the hunter, and the ‘spirit man’ who has no visible body (AC 6, AC 10). The Agent B of these stories is greedy in spite of his wealth and possessions.

The king in the stories relates to the former kings and their privileges. He literally owns his people and has the right to **dù**, ‘eat’, that is to disown their possessions and to be delighted to do so. On the other hand, the king is the looser at the end of the story that leaves him empty-handed. Let us consider for example, the marginal orphan who has no possessions. His survival depends on the goodwill of the king

⁵⁵ This is a tail-head construction that the performer emphasized by an extensive pause (see chapter 9 and section 10.1.).

(AC 6, AC 9). The performers indicate the properties of the opposite agents at the beginning of the story. The contrast increases when the story moves forward. The list shows the contrast in roles and accessory paraphernalia of the pair of agents. It also shows the Fongbe belief system that values the tacit properties of the orphan who fairly is a peer of the gods. The king only has worldly power that finally does not help him very much. Using the technique of Eco, the properties can be listed as follows:

Orphan in the Stories

Loner
 Poor
 On his own
 Powerless
 Youngster
 Speaks
 Friends as company
 Walks in the bush
 Works in the field (serf)
 Clever
 Has links with the gods/ancestors
 At peace

King in the Stories

Two wives at least
 Rich
 Daughters (dowry)
 Mighty
 Adult
 Linguist is speaker
 Formal dignitaries
 Stays in the palace
 No physical work
 Complacent
 Organization of spies
 Involved in wars

Eco's technique is helpful to indicate the contrast that the performers use to emphasize the differences between the orphan and the king when the denouement approaches. The result of the list after Eco is analogous to the one that Steinbrich gave about the images of the powerful (Steinbrich 1995: 100). Steinbrich listed the following antagonistic poles that represent the Lyela orphan and king in Burkina Faso:

Orphan

Young
 Powerless
 Without wife/mother
 Raw food
 Walks around in the bush
 Clever from hard life

King

Old
 Mighty
 Many wives
 Cooked food
 Stays in the village
 Weak from comfortable life

Performers use this duality in properties to highlight the power topic in the stories. The similarity of these lists makes obvious that the properties of the orphan are widely known in the region. The Fon orphan is as powerless as the orphan in Burkina Faso is. I will pick up this issue again when I introduce the technique of the storyboard (chapter 19).

Gods, kings and chiefs have a salient property that illustrates their power: they are the only agents in the stories who do not speak in public. **Dada Ségbó** does not speak to the winner of a contest in a **Ỳgbó** story (Ay 2). Not speaking is a sign of power. Gods and kings have messengers to communicate their message. In one version of ‘The day to thresh the millet’ about the millet ceremony, **Dada Ségbó** sends his messengers to force the denouement (AC 4). The story about the orphan who has neither father nor mother figures two kings. Neither of these kings uses a linguist. The first one is the king of the country of the orphan’s mother who addresses the orphan, and therewith shows that he is a cheat. On the other hand, the king of the country of the father of the orphan has a **gbesetó** ‘spokesman’ and a **gandótó** ‘royal crier’; however, when he wants to have the orphan’s supernatural ring, he makes his daughter speak, and steal the ring for him. He shows that he is a real king (AC 6).

The corpus has three different versions of the ‘Cat and leopard’ story that were told in three different villages. Each of them shows a fine example of the use of power and manipulation. The king, embodied by the leopard, knows that the people highly estimate the traditional doctor, embodied by the cat, so he decides to discredit him. However, all his efforts are in vain, even when he tries to act as a daredevil (AC 16, A 7 and Ay 5).⁵⁶ The king in these stories is an arrogant predator. The leopard in these stories has similar properties as the leopard king in Igbo tales. Azuonye described the leopard king in Igbo tales not only as the symbol of the predatory king, but also as the symbol of the naked power and arrogance of the aristocracy (Azuonye 1995: 72f.). The Fongbe performers made the leopard speak in all three stories of the corpus to convince the audience that the leopard is a pretender and an unreliable chief.

In general these stories do not deliver win-win situations; they describe the ugly win-lose situations that abuse of power may entail. The increase of power of one of the agents reduces the power of the other one.

⁵⁶ Notice that the performers of these stories say that the leopard and the cat are stepsisters; they are women. See also p. 74 about the Fon habit that one does not say openly a person’s name.

6.3. Wealth, food and sex

The stories often mention staple food and cereals, such as **gbadé** ‘maize’, **galí** ‘grated and roasted manioc’, **lí** ‘millet’, and **wǒ** ‘porridge made of cornmeal’. Performers talk about meals and snacks that have beans or peanuts as ingredients, for example **kwíkwí**, lengthy fried chips that are made from peanuts and hot red peppers. Some stories name famine and the lack of meat. It is clear that **làn**, ‘animal’, is a scarce commodity. The main issue of several stories is that an animal is a living being and also somebody’s child that has to be killed before one can eat the meat, as for example in the ‘Cat and leopard’- stories.

One of the stories told in Ayou is staged at the market of the ancestors where the orphan gets his food during a famine. This story lists various food vendors. There are the following stalls: **atánó**, the woman with the bean fritters, **ginó**, the woman with the fermented porridge, **tevíno**, the woman with yam, **nùdúdu dǎbùnó**, the women with all kinds of food, **hwesahutó**, the fishmongers, **lannò nǔ tenmenò kpó**, the butchers. There are also many different snacks for sale: **atá cící**, the spicy bean fritters, **abóbó kpínkpan**, the white beans puree, **adòvlò ami d’é jí**, the white beans puree topped with red palm oil sauce (Ay 4). It is clear that food is a major factor in the daily life of the villagers. Livestock is a symbol of wealth. The story of the two friends describes wealth as power in terms of the rewarding market rights of **Aja** and becoming the kings’ linguist, which is a much sought-after position (AC 5, see also chapter 5).

A number of stories tell about conflicts between people that affect the dwelling or the clan. The theft of food often happens, though the aftermath is different (AC 1, 2, 3, 4, A 5). There are several stories about stealing somebody’s food or replacing it by one’s excrements or one’s genitals. One story tells that a wife eats the hunter’s snails and replaces them by her genitals (AC 1); a second story tells that the first wife eats the sauce of her younger co-wife and destroys it by defecating in the sauce (AC 3). The penalty is death (AC 1, A 5), or exile (AC 2).

Some stories show that there is a difference between the ownership and the possession of a special object. The god or spirit who provides the object owns a magic object. If an agent gets extraordinarily wealthy thanks to a divine object, the wealth still increases as long as the object is in his possession. If a thief steals the object, the former keeper loses everything he possessed. The thief becomes the keeper and gets the wealth that goes with it (AC 6). On the other hand, the keeper of a divine gift often loses his possessions when he forgets the due religious sacrifices (AC 8).

The stories clearly disapprove of theft. The penalty is harsh: death or exile. On the other hand, the contrary happens in the trickster stories where the trickster continuously deceives the agents while he escapes punishment.

6.4. Benevolence, malevolence and taboos

Stories about benevolence and malevolence refer to duties and obligations. The **Yèhwe Zogbannɔ** stories are about benevolence and malevolence (AC 7, AC 19). The Fon people believe that the python **Dan** is the **vodun** who is the incarnation of **Măwũ**. He kills the man who neglects the obligatory libations (AC 8). Friends are supposed to help each other, kings are supposed to be just, and all human beings are supposed to show humility by sacrificing to the deities (AC 5, AC 6, AC 8). The corpus also contains several stories that deal with the violation of taboos, such as telling a secret to somebody else. Trees and shrubs are the places where a god seeks shelter for a while. From there they speak up freely on the condition that the people to whom they speak must keep the secret to themselves (Ay 1, AC 1, AC 8, AC 10). The **Yěyè** stories are about metamorphoses and the necessity to keep these a secret as well (Ay 1, AC 10).

Several stories show the human incapacity to deal with the divine plagues, like madness and evil (AC 12, 13, 14, 15, 18). Furthermore, the corpus shows two ‘erotic’ tales that also refer to religious devices (AC 9, AC 11). Obviously, sexual harassment also is a taboo and is not accepted.

Many of the Fon taboos are obvious; dishonesty and fraud are perfidious acts that undermine any community or society. The taboos figure in the stories as undesirable human misbehaviour, like jealousy, lies and slander, arrogance, disrespect, hatred, neglect, attempted murder or homicide. The agents B see external factors as famine or war as causes of the felony. The topic of the taboo of killing one’s own children is prominent in a number of stories, casting different agents. The story about ‘Cat and leopard’ shows this taboo. The cat does not eat the meat of the leopard cubs, nor does she serve it to her children. She cooks the meat once more, prepares a fresh sauce, and returns the meal to the leopard. The taboo concerns the interdiction to kill one’s children or to eat them. The Moon keeps her children in the Fongbe and the Mina stories, as the cat does in the Fongbe stories. On the other hand, the god Sun kills his children, as the leopard does. However, the Sun is a god, and henceforth his children change into fishes, definitely for the good of men. This taboo suits the Fon morale, as well as the one of the neighbouring Mina (AC 17; Verdier 1973 II: 181).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The story that Verdier published is an explanation of the lunar eclipse. This is identical to the Calavi story. However, the performer of the Mina story tells a different story with a content that is similar to one of the ‘Cat and leopard’-stories in the corpus (see chapter 19).

6.5. The tricksterstories: deceit and deception

The trickster stories show a model of the world that is the opposite of the above-described stories. The **yèxó**, ‘trickster stories’, show one single topic that is tricking. The trickster is the central participant, and the main topic is about tricking somebody to rob him of his food, his possessions, or even his life, without getting the penalty afterwards. The aim of his deceit is to be better off. Therefore, the trickster violates taboos, and still, he is rewarded for his wavering loyalty by getting the booty.

Let us consider the topic of one of the trickster stories that were told in Ayou. The performer called this story ‘The first story’. The story tells how the reign of the world got into the hands of a human being (Ay 2). The story is about **Dada Ségbó**, the Great Spirit ancestor who has three daughters that he wants to marry off to one husband. Therefore, he organises a contest about three objects that he hid. The trickster **Adonnye** is also in the room of the king where he spies upon him. He sees how the king prepares the contest by putting the butterfly and the rat each in a calabash, and the chameleon in a shawl. The trickster wants to help his stepbrother to win the contest. This man’s name is **Ahwansoblenó**, meaning ‘impostor of the contest’. The trickster reveals the secret to his stepbrother **Ahwansoblenó**, who by chance forgets the secret several times. However, the trickster secretly communicates through a whistle and his stepbrother finally wins the contest. **Dada** is pleased that someone won the contest. He does not know that he is deceived. He gives his three daughters and half of his possessions to his new son-in-law. **Dada Ségbó** is the owner of the universe; he stays in heaven and the smart cheat wins the earth and the power and wealth that go with it. He is the new owner of the world.⁵⁸

In the trickster stories, there is a lot of savoury food that smells good, and for which all Fon children lust. However, they do not dare to steal it, as their hero does indeed. In one of the stories, there is a famine in the real world. The trickster secretly follows the orphan to the market of the ancestors and he succeeds in stealing food from the orphan and the old woman. However, the old woman catches the trickster and puts him in a hole, and the orphan leaves them. The hyena passes and the trickster deceives the hyena and puts it in the hole.⁵⁹ The trickster escapes, and in the end the hyena gets the penalty (Ay 4). In a second story, the trickster deceives the leopard that tries to steal his meal. The trickster convinces the leopard that he must try another hairdo to find a mate. However, he ties his hair to the branch of a tree. The termites, which embody the ancestors, save the leopard from falling. The

⁵⁸ During the performance the performer changes the name **Ahwansoblenó** into **Soliblenó**, ‘the impostor consolidates’, and at the end **Ahwansoliviblenó**, ‘the sweat impostor of the contest’.

⁵⁹ Please note that this market is the market of the ancestors, and ‘hole’ also has ‘grave’ as a connotation.

trickster takes revenge and he deceives the termites by stealing the drinks that the leopard, as promised, had bought for them (Ay 7).

In a third story, the bush animals ask the trickster to kill the child of a ferocious animal. The lizard sees this happening and accuses *Yḍgbó*, who blames the lizard and cuts its tongue. The lizard is incapable of speaking up anymore and the bush animals slaughter the lizard (Ay 8). In a trickster story told in Abomey the trickster tries to rob the billy goat of a bullock that the billy goat had won. However, the billy goat succeeds in getting it back (A 10). Only one story mentions the deception of the trickster himself. The elders in the Land of Sky succeed in deceiving the trickster and chase him from the abundant quantities of food in the House of Rain (Ay 3). In all other stories, the trickster gets away without punishment.

The stories about the Fon *Yḍgbó* show that he is just as greedy as the Ewe trickster *Yiyi*. On the other hand, the Fongbe trickster stories differ from the comic Ewegbe stories that Konrad published, for they do not show features related to sex and excrement (Konrad 1994: 64).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ These features only occur in the Fongbe dramatic stories.

7. The genre

This section deals with the characteristics of the Fon genre **hwènùxó**. The starting point is that the **hwènùxó** story is the performance of a story that is rooted in the culture and the religion of the Fon people who live in the rural areas of the south of Benin at the time of recording in 1976.

In this section, I will discuss the nature of the stories in terms of a narrative genre. I will start with the characteristics that the performers gave. I will consider the following three aspects of the **hwènùxó** that occur in the corpus: the dramatic stories, the trickster stories, and the moral extension in the songs. This will lead to a first classification in terms of genre. I will finally discuss the classifications in previous publications.

7.1. The Fongbe hwènùxó

The performers called the stories of the corpus **hwènùxó**. The performers said that **hwènùxó** are stories that happened in the past or stories that might have happened in the past. The word **hwènù** literally means ‘mouth of sun’, that is ‘time’, and **xó** means ‘words’ (Segurola and Rassinoux 2000: 249). A second analysis is that **hwènù** means ‘when’ that occurs in a WHEN-clause (see 10.1.). According to Guédou the stories are the words of the elders that relate to an event in the past (see 1.5.1.). The performers themselves consider the stories either ‘history’ or ‘fiction’. It is crucial to notice that the duality is inherent to the system of the Fongbe **hwènùxó**, which apparently perceives history and fiction as a set of similar entities that stem from the past. Storytellers used the stories for educating children and entertaining the audience.

The setting of the stories is the world of the rural Fon people. This world consists of a series of dwellings, of the market in a nearby village and of **dñ**, meaning ‘over there’ or ‘the supernatural world’ (see 5.1.). The religious cults and devices play an important role in these stories. The central participant of the dramatic stories has divine power due to **Fa**, the diviner and the guardian spirit. The central participant objects to the practice of human vices and its fatal consequences, for example the effects of misbehaviour such as the neglect of the due sacrifices. The stories reflect real life and refer to the envy of those who have access to food, sex and money. Moreover, all stories have one of the following elements in common: the power of the supernatural, interdictions and commands, and the violation of taboos. The majority of the stories have no morale at the end of the story. The main reason is that the denouement and the penalty of the culprit speak for themselves. Performers sometimes end a story with the expression ‘That is why’ just to indicate that they make an end to their story. The performer seldom spontaneously delivers morale;

the audience has to ask for an explanation. On the other hand, the performer who wishes to make a moral statement inserts a song by the central participant. One of the main features of the **hwènùxó** is that they report the importance of the religious devices and the support of the gods.

However, the corpus shows a clear distinction between the dramatic stories and the comic trickster stories: dramatic stories focus on human behaviour and the necessity to consult the guardian spirit; comic stories show the smartness of the trickster. Subsequently, I will discuss two distinct subgenres: the **hwènùxó** – dramatic stories – and the **yèxó** – comic stories. Both subgenres have each a different message. The dramatic stories convey that the initially powerful agent pays the penalty for the misery he caused in the story. The comic stories show that the trickster even deceives the powerful, although he sometimes has a narrow escape.

7.2. The subgenre **hwènùxó**: dramatic stories

The central participant in dramatic stories is the guardian spirit who is embodied in an object, an animal or a god. Dramatic stories have the following elements in common: the use of formulae, the transformation of gods into human beings or animals, the consultation of the diviner of the guardian spirit, and the denouement by the central participant.

21 out of 29 performances in Abomey-Calavi and Abomey start with a formula. The opening formula points at the essence of the **hwènùxó** that encounters a topic that belongs to the Fongbe society. The opening formula is the following:

hwènù-xó **cé** **z̀n** **m̀** **v̀in** **bó** **yí** **m̀**
 time-GEN.speech POS₁ move AV IP CJss get find
 ‘my story took off to fly, fast hovering around like a bird, and it landed upon’

The formula uses the metaphor of a bird. Fon people credit birds with the properties of the gods who are able to journey between the sky and the earth. The opening formula compares the movement of the story to the hovering around of a bird: **v̀in** is the Fongbe ideophone of the fast and long lasting hovering around of a bird through the air.⁶¹ Sometimes the word **gée** is used which expresses the going to an intentional goal. The performers in Abomey-Calavi and Abomey end their performance by simply saying ‘My story ends here’, or ‘That is it!’. They also use the expression ‘My story ends here at the top of the little toe!’, meaning ‘the end’. Performers sometimes use the Gungbe word **ajlu**, ‘story’, that is synonymous to the Fongbe **hwènùxó**.

⁶¹ Segurola reports the ideophone as **v̀in** (Segurola 1968: 557).

After the opening formula, the performers start the actual story with the naming of the pair of agents and the topic (see chapter 11). Agents represent the dual nature of the gods of the Fongbe pantheon who are also two sides of a coin (see 5.5.).

This subgenre **hwènùxó** is intrinsically dramatic, for it ends with the penalty of the culprit agent who has to pay for violating a taboo. The stories name two penalties that are both terrible in the Fon society: the agent must leave the dwelling, i.e. he goes into exile, or he dies as the inevitable consequence of his crime. However, what happens to the agent to whom harm is done? The stories do not mention a victory or a happy end after the punishment. At the end, there is neither reconciliation nor reward. The story does not change society, and the victim learns that there is no escape from the world as it is.

This subgenre shows also a small number of specific dramatic stories that have the described elements, but also slightly distinct elements. The number is too small to facilitate a thorough analysis. Therefore, I will only give a brief description. These stories also are **hwènùxó**, according to the performers and to Guédou's classification (Guédou 1985). The stories are dramatic stories, for they end with either the perpetuity of misfortune or the punishment of the culprit.

Three **hwènùxó** of the corpus are **tàn**, 'history of the clan'; in this case the Zomagba clan. The performers indicate at the start that the story happened 'a long time ago', or 'in those days' (AC 12, AC 13, AC 19; Guédou 1985: 409). Actually, these three stories are open-ended, for they may go on infinitely. One of these stories uses a remarkable 'call-and-response' technique between the performer and the audience that Finnegan described (Finnegan 1992: 98). The story cherishes the memory of King **Adjahuto** who founded the **Adanhunsa** market in Allada and the daughter of **Gawu**, the chief of the king's army (AC 13). The Abomey-Calavi 12 story tells about the burden of insanity. It refers to the expression **ká kpó go kpó**, 'calabashes and gourds', meaning a person's assets (possessions and people). The diviner advises to break all bottles and plates to heal the insanity. Maupoil recites the same topic (Maupoil 1988: 614). The Abomey-Calavi 19 story points out the divine status of twins (see pp. 82-84).

The performers consider **núbàsó**, 'dilemma tales', also **hwènùxó**. One story of the corpus is a dilemma tale (A 9). This story ends with the solution of the dilemma. The Fongbe classification according to Guédou distinguishes two categories of **núbàsó**, the brief riddles and the relatively longer dilemma tales (Guédou 1985: 413, 416).

Furthermore, the corpus shows two 'amorous' stories that also refer to religious devices (AC 9 and AC 11; see also 6.3.). These stories are about sexual harassment by women. One of the stories refers to **Bligede**, the **vodun** of the **xé**, 'prickly shrub', whose society **zàngbètó** wears raphia clothes. At night, they protect the villagers

against thieves. They also produce chairs for passers-by in the area that surrounds Abomey-Calavi (AC 10 and Ay 1; Désiré Vigan, personal communication).

7.3. The subgenre *yèxó*: comic stories

Yògbó is the central participant of the Fongbe *yèxó*, ‘stories about **Yè**’, as the performers in Ayou call him. The trickster’s name changes to **Yè** when he enters the supernatural world. The Fongbe *yè* means ‘spirit’ and ‘somebody’s double’ (see also p. 76). **Yògbó** is the impersonation of a bold character who challenges gods and ancestors, and who often gets off in spite of his tricks. It is clear that he is neither divine nor human though he is said to be capable of travelling to the supernatural world and back.⁶² Trickster stories have in common that their setting often is the supernatural world. This world is either the Land of Sky where the elders live, or the market of the ancestors where the orphan finds his food (Ay 3, Ay 4).

Five out of eight performances in Ayou are about the trickster ‘Fat big **Yò**’ or **Yè** (Ay 2, 3, 4, 7, 8; see also 14.1. Style). The trickster stories differ from the dramatic stories in so far that the trickster is the powerful central participant. The agents in the Ayou 2 story are the following: **Dada Ségbó**, ‘Great Spirit’, and the trickster’s stepbrother **Ahwansoblenó**. They figure in ‘The first story’ that relates how the trickster pilfers the world from the eldest god (Ay 2). The Ayou 3 story stages the African harrierhawk and the elders as agents: the trickster travels to the Land of Sky hidden in the feathers of **gangan**, ‘the African harrier hawk’, but he is chased from the House of Rain by a crafty trick of the **mèxo**, ‘the elders’ (Ay 3). The agents in the Ayou 4 story are the orphan and the hyena: the trickster wants to accompany **nɔcyòvi**, ‘the orphan’, to the market of the ancestors. At the market, the orphan finally gets bored with the trickster and leaves him with the old woman and **hla**, ‘the hyena’, that wants to kill the trickster who succeeds in having a narrow escape (Ay 4). The agents in the Ayou 7 story are the leopard and the termites. **Kpò**, ‘the leopard’, wants to steal the food from the trickster who deceives the leopard by tying him into a tree. **Kósú**, ‘the termites’, save the leopard’s life, but when they arrive to get their reward, it appears that the trickster got in first and took all the food and drinks (Ay 7).⁶³ The Ayou 8 story stages the following agents: the small ferocious animal and the grey lizard. The trickster kills **kanlínvi** ‘the small ferocious animal’ at the request of the bush animals. **Alotó**, ‘the grey lizard’ sees this happening. He accuses the trickster who, at his turn, cuts the lizard’s tongue to prevent him from

⁶² Notice that the trickster crashed when he jumped across the rope that the elders tethered to the steep pit that separates sky and earth (Ay 3).

⁶³ The performer creates confusion by using **sò** alternately as ‘tomorrow’ and ‘yesterday’ (see also p. 193).

speaking up, whereupon the bush animals kill the lizard (Ay 8; see also p. 96). It is obvious that one of the agents plays the part of the deceived one; he is punished for the trickster's crimes and misbehaviour. The **yèxó**, 'trickster stories', are comic for two reasons. First, **Yǒgbó** goes unpunished whether he violates taboos or challenges gods and ancestors. Moreover, nobody is capable of competing against him when it comes to deceit and deception.

The Fongbe word **adɔnɔ** literally means 'owner of the web', though my consultant always translated it into the French 'ogre', that is 'the big eater'. The trickster in the corpus continuously tries to outwit his opponents. The performers call him 'Mr Big' and 'Sir', which are titles that the Fon use to address wise men. This solemn form of address also emphasizes the comic nature of these stories.

The performers in Ayou also considered the following stories as trickster stories: 'Rooster and elephant' and the comic version of the 'Cat and leopard' (Ay 6, Ay 5). Both stories stage a small central participant, respectively a rooster and a kitten that deceive a much bigger adversary by using a trick. The aphorism of these stories refers to one of the 256 maxims of **Fa**: a very small thing causes a lot of trouble. Notice that the Ayou version of the 'Cat and leopard' story is a comic story that considerably differs from the two other dramatic versions in the corpus.⁶⁴

The two dramatic versions of the 'Cat and leopard'-stories use the word **awíí** 'cat' (AC 16, A 7). The Abomey-Calavi 16 story was told at night, though the word is said to be prohibited at night (Guédou 1985: 428). On the other hand, the Ayou performer used the word **awíí** in the first utterance of his performance that took place in the morning, but he continued with the **Ayizɔgbe** word **adeé** (Ay 5). The performer of a story in Abomey-Calavi uses the **Gengbè** word **asé** (AC 6).

Trickster stories are not open-ended. The trickster's counterparts always find out his deceit, though he himself rarely is punished for his misbehaviour. On the contrary, at the end, the trickster has a narrow escape. An innocent agent pays the penalty, for he pays the price for his stupidity of getting involved with the trickster. This is contrary to the dramatic stories that end with the penalty of the culprit. The trickster always manipulates the agents, until he blames the innocent agent, who is naive, for the deception that he caused himself. The crowd exiles or kills the credulous agent.

The comic **yèxó** stories from Ayou have no opening formula as the dramatic **hwènùxó** have. The performers of the comic stories comment on the central participant and his exploits before starting their performance. These clauses are spontaneous remarks. The performer's anticipation of the trickster's actions and motives before he starts the performance is shown by the following example:

⁶⁴ Here, gender is a decisive factor; men tell comic stories, and women tell dramatic stories. See also p. 63 ff, and 5.5. Religious devices.

yè d́ó kpò ś lá lan
 yè put leopard DEF branch hurt
 ye wè é kún d̀ò wèn d̀e ó
 yè aFOC 3SG NEG be message INDF NEG

‘Yè lured the leopard in the tree to kill him; it was Yè, he gave an important message’ (Ay 7).

The performers end all eight performances with a final formula. The final formula conveys the truth of the story by using the metaphor of a bird. The closing formula is the following:

a je tɔ godo gbejí ś alwɛ na d́ó swé ée
 2SG fall water GEN.LOC away TOP_{CL} bird FUT say ADJ
 ‘If you go far behind the lagoon, the swallow discloses the truth.’

The performer of comic stories sometimes tells us why the trickster is capable of deceiving us all. The performer comments on the trickster’s behaviour, after the final formula, that is after the performance (Ay 4, Ay 8). The following example shows the comment:

nu é wútú wè adɔ-nɔ yɔgbo=kpó nù
 thing 3SG body aFOC web-GEN.owner yɔgbo=and thing
 d̀é=kpó
 INDEF=and⁶⁵

mɔ nɔ d́ó do nũ wu ǎ
 NEG RM put hole thing body NEG

b̀ò wu nɔ kú jè nù d̀é mé gbedé
 CJds body RM die fall thing INDF interior never

wu jan nɔ zin mɛ d́ó d̀ò
 body precisely RM trick person put hole

‘That is why it did not happen that ‘the web’s owner’, *Ỳ̀gbo* and anyone else, whoever he might be, were trapped together. And he never got trapped, he always fooled other people.’ (Fragment spoken after the performance of the story Ayou 8, 1976-04-30).

The performer also comments on ‘The rooster and the elephant’ by adding the following remark after the final formula: ‘The rooster was once again the hero.’

⁶⁵The transcription is based on the pauses that the performer made (see chapter 9.)

These comments on the **yèxó** are very illustrative. The performers consider the trickster a real being that is here with us. He is part of the Fon heritage. His adversaries do not kill him; they send him away. To no effect, for he will always come back and commit his ‘crimes’. The comic story ends with the death of the trickster’s victim.

The performers consider the trickster stories **hwènùxó**. The reason is the analogy of the setting and the religious aspects that also occur in the dramatic **hwènùxó**. All **hwènùxó**, dramatic and comic stories, are verbal art as defined by Bascom (Bascom 1965: 3). Fongbe verbal art is a narrative discourse that uses many poetic elements. I will discuss this in chapter 14, Style.

7.4. The extension with **hàn**, ‘songs’

Performers inserted twenty-three different **hàn** ‘songs’, in 19 out of the 37 stories of the corpus to convey the moral extension of the denouement. The central participant is always the singer of these songs. The song reveals the role of the central participant and lists his divine power. The song refers to a taboo or the violation of a prohibition, and nails the impostor that is Agent B. The performer always emphasizes that the central participant is about to sing a song, saying **é ji hàn**, ‘he gave birth to a song’, meaning that the song is already there to be performed. The song is a poetic narrative that conveys morale or a religious explanation. The dramatic and comic stories have 23 songs in total. The performers sang five songs in four comic stories (Ay 2, Ay 5, Ay 7, Ay 8); they sang 18 songs in 15 dramatic stories (Ay 1, AC 1, AC 2, AC 4, AC 5, AC 7, AC 8, AC 9, AC 10, AC 19, A 2, A 3, A 4, A 5, A 7).

After singing the song, the performer often adds that the central participant repeated the song several times. On the other hand, performers also repeat a song for dramatic reasons, such as in the story about the horned animals that arrive one after another, each time with more horns, in the distant field. In this story, the performer sung the song eight times (AC 7).

The performers sometimes insert ‘call and response’ songs. This happens in both comic and dramatic stories. In one comic story of the corpus, the ‘call and response’ songs are sung by alternately **Yǒgbó** and his stepbrother **Ahwansoblenó** (Ay 2). The performer of a dramatic story inserted two songs that she repeated three times. The first song conveys that the eldest son thwarted his father’s wish; the response song conveys the disbelief of the father. This song has twice an identical chorus that changes in the third response (A 3). The corpus also shows a story in which the central participant sings three different songs, of which the first one is repeated four

times and the second one is repeated three times; the last song is sung only once. This song provides us with a fatal end (AC 19).

The songs of the two versions of ‘The sadist co-wife’, for example, show different songs, although the difference concerns the objects that try to break the saucepot, the central participant. The song in Abomey-Calavi 2 is sung in the **Maxi** language, and lists the following stone objects: the big stone and the fireplace of three cone-formed stones. The song in Abomey 5 is in Abomey Fongbe. It lists the following wooden objects: the threshold, the drawknife to cut calabashes, the edge of a hoe, the wooden bed strut, and the wooden spoon that is meant for stirring the **wǎ**, ‘porridge’ (AC 2, A 5).

On the other hand, it also happens that similar stories have similar songs. This is the case of the two versions of ‘The day to thresh the millet’ (AC 4, A 4) and of ‘Hunter Little Finger and the chief’ (Ay 1, AC 10). The three stories about ‘Cat and leopard’, for example, have an identical topic, but only the comic edition of this story ends with a song by the central participant. This is the youngest cat who dares to sing a song that reflects his thorough contempt for the leopard, his aunt (Ay 5). The song tells about the eyes of the dead leopard cub that open and close as the eyes of a doll, when the cat grabs the head of the cub and shakes it back and forth (Ay 5).

Four of the seven comic stories from Ayou have a song. One of the **Yǎgbó** stories depicts how the trickster and his stepbrother **Ahwansobelenó**, ‘the impostor of the contest’, in short **belenó é**, meaning ‘my dear mad one’ speak a language that nobody understands (Ay 2).⁶⁶ The trickster conveys the secret by playing the wooden Fon whistle. The language of the two songs of this story is **Ayizogbe**. The stepbrother forgets the secret, and he sings ‘I call you, I forgot the secret.’ Thereupon, the trickster answers: ‘You, stupid one. Listen to me, listen to my whistle.’

The performers set the songs apart from the prose narrative by the use of melody and rhyme, as well as the direct speech by the central participant. Choruses specifically show poetic features, such as alliteration and assonance, whether the lines have sense or not (see chapter 15). Songs clearly are the ‘poetic’ narrative that the central participant sings, when he relates the consequences of the incident of the story (Bascom 1965: 3). Furthermore, the rhythm of the song differs audibly from the spoken discourse (see 9.1. Pauses). Guédou confirms just a part of my findings when he affirms that the melody makes the song a fundamentally separate genre (Guédou 1985: 458).

⁶⁶ **é** is a variation of the possessive adjective **cé**, ‘my’; it is used to express the affection of the speaker for an object or a person.

One song is remarkable for its outspoken performance by the storyteller who beat the rhythm with both hands on the left side of her chest (A 3). The performer added this song to a story about the deadly bite of **amanyonu jakpata**, ‘the puff adder’, that is the eleventh sign of **Fa**. The chorus of this song uses the words for funeral drums **adite hungbo hungba**, ‘standing drum, big drum, breaking drum’. The storyteller got very excited during the performance. The singing and the beating come close to the ritual **xò akàn**, ‘to beat the chest’, which is mentioned by Maupoil (Maupoil 1988: 28; see p. 49).

Performers deliver similar stories with or without a song. When they choose to sing a song, either the song or the chorus is similar. This proves that the insertion of a song is an optional item that depends on the performer’s individual choice.

7.5. The supergenre of Fongbe **hwènùxó**

Let us consider those elements of the stories that are relevant in defining the genre of the **hwènùxó**. The performers and the audience often emphasized that the stories are either history or fiction, and refer to what happened in a far past. The dramatic stories deal with the tragic fate of men, while the comic stories deal with the eternal escapes of the trickster who challenges the gods. One may say that both the dramatic and comic stories reflect the Fon belief system. On the other hand, this reminds us of the Fon model of the world that thinks in duality. Fon people perceive history and fiction as two of a kind, one wise and the other one powerful. The duality is a system of two similar entities that stems from the past.

One of the main features of the stories is that they depict supernatural beings or events that involve the belief system of the Fon people. The religious pantheon plays a crucial role in the stories. The central participant of the dramatic stories symbolizes the power of the far away goddess **Măwũ** ‘Moon’ who incarnates the guardian spirit **Sé** and the **Fa** divination. The diviner is the intermediary between the guardian spirit and the object or being that belongs to the earthly world of **hwènùxó**. The trickster is the central participant of the comic stories; he is ‘the big shadow’ who has no name, no face and no figure, but the performers call him names by adding epithets and by creating epitomes (see 14.1.). In the comic stories **yèxó**, the trickster is the central participant that challenges **Dada Ségbó** ‘Great Spirit’ who is a higher and older god.

The stories are about the Fon gods who change temporarily into human beings or animals, and who allegorically incarnate high or specific positions in human society. The gods are the agents of the stories, and hence they have no name, no figure and no face. On the other hand, the gods are recognisable, for the agents have functions that refer to a specific sign of **Fa**, and a specific god. Recall that Fon people are

reticent to say aloud the names of the gods or human beings. They prefer to address people and gods in their status, or they use the names that stem from the **Sé**-initiation (see 5.5).

Let us consider an example in one of the editions of ‘The day to thresh the millet’. The household is about to start the threshing of the millet, and they all think that the king will be humiliated for his marrying a one-armed girl. Before the threshing starts, the obligatory libations to the god in question take place.

ée [0,91]

CI

‘when’

azǎn ɔ so-gbè nùgbó é ɔ [2,12] [cliff hanger]

day DEF millet-GEN.day truth RES TOP_{CL}

‘when the day of the ceremony of the millet arrived indeed’

yě bé akpakpo [1,05]

3PL collect threshing.flail

‘they picked up the threshing flails’

dè li xiyá [1,32]

be millet leave.to.dry

‘meant for the dried millet’

bo yè bé akpakpo [1,77]

CJss 3PL gather threshing.flail

‘and they picked up the threshing flails’

kɔn ny’ayĩ [0,86]

pour throw.on-ground

‘pouring libations on the ground’

mɛ-ta mɛ-ta [0,59]

god-GEN.head god-GEN.head

‘to the king of the gods, to the king of the gods’ [A 4: 127-133]

The word **mɛ** means ‘person’, but has also the meaning of ‘god’. Fon people never mention the name of the god **Sakpata** who is the god of the rain and smallpox, but also the king of the hole, that is the truth. The hole in a wall and the harvest of millet are the paraphernalia of the central participant, which play a decisive role in the Abomey 4 story (see appendix 2).

Human beings become animals and vice versa, but neither human beings nor animals are able to change into gods. The song by the central participant often explains the morality of the story. The performers carefully indicate the end of the story with clauses such as ‘That is why one does not repay evil for evil’ (AC 5), or ‘My **hwènùxó** ends here, there you are!’ (AC 4), and ‘I break off my **hwènùxó** against the top of my little toe’ (AC 19).

In the view of an outsider, the **hwènùxó** may call to mind the Ancient Greek myths, and the Old Testament of the Bible. Greek myths were part of religion in ancient Greece. On the other hand, the Old Testament provides us with many interdictions and prophecies. Myths have meaningful elements that tally with the elements that I discussed in the above (Armstrong 2005). The oracle of Delphi and the prophecies in the Old Testament resemble the **Fa** divination, for they are part of a belief system, which trusts the prophet. The God in the Old Testament has three names of which one must not be spoken. This reminds us of the Fon usage to avoid saying someone’s name, or the inhibition to speak **Sakpata**’s name. Let us consider the basic meaning of the Greek **μῦθος** that is ‘speech’ in the sense of ‘spoken language’. It also means ‘message’, ‘story’ and ‘myth’, ‘fable’ and ‘proverb’. The Greek **λόγος** means ‘story’ and ‘fable’ (Thiel and Den Boer 1961). The distinction shows that myth is religious prose, and that a story is fictitious prose. It becomes obvious that this discussion does not help much to understand the performers’ supergenre **hwènùxó**.

Let us also recall the studies of Guédou who considered the genre **hwènùxó** the words of the Elders, that is an indigenous Fon genre that he defined as long educational stories that give advices for life. He considered the **hwènùxó** the narrative of an event in the past. In his view, the dramatic stories are about human beings, and the comic stories are about beings that do not exist, and that never existed (see p. 30).

Let us get down to basics and return to the underlying principle of duality that I discussed earlier (see 1.2., 1.3., and 5.4.). The principle of duality was crucial in the institutions of the Kingdom. The principle of duality was still crucial in the gods that the Fon people of the rural areas worshipped in 1976. Duality defines also the pair of agents that the performer stages as a function or a status. The contrastive functionality of the agents is basic. The duality conveys power and the lack of power. However, the end of the story shows that the powerful Agent B is the culprit. Thanks to the supernatural help from the central participant, Agent A is no longer a victim as long as it lasts! The distinction between dramatic stories and comic stories is a dichotomy that accounts for the principle of duality. This distinction is systematic: dramatic stories report inhibitions, comic stories tell sacrileges. Therefore, in the view of the performers, both types of stories fit in the same indigenous genre, the supergenre **hwènùxó**.

7.6. Discussion of previous publications about the genre

Verbal art from Benin was subject of several publications. Let us go back to these publications to find out whether they considered that Fongbe stories consist of myths about gods, and tales or legends about human beings or animals. Note that previous publications described the genre by using translated versions of the stories, which were based on the renderings and summaries that an interpreter gave during the storytelling. There are no recorded versions publicly available (Le Hérissé 1911, Herskovits and Herskovits 1970, Maupoil 1988, and Guédou 1985). Guédou published one transcription, and Konrad published several transcriptions of the original edition (Konrad 1994). The corpus of the Herskovitses differs widely from the stories that Le Hérissé and Maupoil published. It is also hard to link his corpus to the stories of the corpus.

Both Le Hérissé and Maupoil agreed that the Fongbe stories of their corpora are myths and legends. In their view, stories about gods are myths, and stories about human beings and animals are legends. Note that the French word ‘légende’ has a different connotation from the English ‘legend’. The English ‘legend’ means a folktale, a fictitious story. The French ‘légende’ has also the meaning of ‘myth’, and indicates the history of the life of a saint that a priest tells in the church to edify the believers.

One of the subgenres described by Guédou is worth considering, that is the **xèxó** ‘words of the birds’, fables about animals. The subgenre **xèxó** does not correspond at all to the subgenre that Herskovits called ‘heho’: fables about animals widely differ from the secular or non-religious tales that Herskovits defined in seven subclasses, amongst which divination and hunter stories, as well as ‘Enfant terrible’ and Yo stories (see also p. 28). In chapter 5, I discussed the important role of the **Fa** divination in these stories that according to Herskovits are not religious, and about which he remarked the following:

“The tales falling within the category of ‘heho’ contrast with the ‘hwenoho’ in that they permit the teller greater latitude in interpretation, in joining incidents from several stories, and in elaborating a single incident to comment on a currently apt parallel.” (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 23).⁶⁷

This quotation shows that Herskovits definitely contradicted the French descriptions of Fongbe storytelling. However, it is amazing that the quote correctly expresses ‘the thing’ that the performers of the corpus do in the performance of **hwènùxó**. Moreover, some of the elements in the Herskovitses renderings of stories are

⁶⁷ Pelton copied the distinction made by Herskovits mentioning that the Fon and the other ‘nonliterate peoples’ distinguish between a form of ‘sacred history’ and a ‘literature of the imagination’ (Pelton 1980: 19).

recognizable. I also see a resemblance when it comes to his remarks about the use of similar elements or plots in different stories by the storytellers.

8. Conclusions on the nature of the stories

The stories of the corpus are all set in the surroundings that are familiar to the performers and the audience. This world consists of the Fongbe dwelling, and the market in a nearby village. This world consists also of **dǔn**, 'the supernatural world'. Performers refer to **dǔn** by mentioning religious devices and by dropping hints about the symbols or appearances of the gods and the ancestors.

The stories are well known and have their roots in society. They show many references to the Kingdom and the two major pantheons and their cults. The nature of the stories is religious, and belongs to the Fon belief system. A great number of stories refer to the important role of divination. The stories reflect the diviner's devices that are important in the Fon society. It means that the stories often have an underlying meaning that is only understandable if one knows the meaning of the symbols that are used. The performers say that the stories relate to events that happened in the distant past and to imaginary events that might have happened.

The central participant is the only character of the story, for the performer depicts him as a sentient being (see 5.2.). The central participant is the star actor of the story who acts as the problem solver. The central participant of a dramatic story is an object that often is the temporary abode of a god. He is either a personal object or the transformation of a deity. The central participant relates to the personnel guardian spirit **Sé**, whose cult the **bokónǎ** 'diviner' worships. He uses the religious devices that are associated with the **Fa** divination and its rituals and symbols. The Fon people consider the central participant as a being with divine power. Performers only provide us with his properties, but not with his looks. The trickster **Yǔgbó** is the central participant in seven out of nine comic stories.

The stories stage also a pair of agents. Their role in the stories is accessory; they are props that process the story. There is a good agent A, and a bad agent B, who are like two sides of a coin. They both have the properties to play the appropriate role. The important feature of the agents is the duality that embodies the divine principle of duality. This principle stems from the gods that the Fon people in the rural areas worship, and the dualistic organisation of the former Kingdom. The properties of the agents can refer to one of the 256 **Fa**. Agents have neither looks, nor ideas. They frequently have no personal name; they are a function or a status in the story. Agents are either functional agents or common agents. A number of agents have the powerful properties of one of the gods. The common agents are artisans like the blacksmith, or the costermonger who sells her goods at the market.

The background of the stories reflects two of the Dahomean pantheons. Religious devices, gods and ancestors are part of the plot. Gods can change into human beings or animals. Human beings can change into animals and vice versa. Human beings can never change into gods. Notice that Fon people are reticent about speaking the

names of their gods. They address people and gods in their status. The numerous religious devices used by the agents also refer to the gods of the pantheon. The actions of the agents give insight in the existing power relations in society. The divination of the oracle **Fa** plays a crucial role in the stories of the corpus. The involvement of **Fa** is double: **Fa** structures the story by the divination that supports the good agent; and secondly **Fa** changes the course of the story by helping to reveal the culprit of the incident.

The Fongbe **hwènùxó** has three main topics: power, conflicts and taboos.

The topic of power pictures the divine power of the gods, and the functional power of the powerful of the earth, the kings and the chiefs. The power topic occurs in stories about divine power or the power of the powerful, the kings and the chiefs. These stories end with the loss of power by the culprit, who is sent into exile or into death. The second topic is about conflicts of abundance, food and sex or the lack of one of these. These stories also end with the penalty of the culprit who must die or is sent into exile. The third topic concerns the sacral duties and the violation of taboos. The violation of taboos and the duties to sacrifice leads also to a penalty; that is to lose all one's possessions for good, which is a great personal sacrifice. The comic trickster stories elaborate the topic of power on his common practice of deceit and deception. Comic stories end with the penalty of an innocent being that dares to thwart the trickster. The trickster may lose the game, but he always will survive and continue to entertain us.

Twenty-three songs **hàn** are inserted in 19 stories of the corpus. The central participant is the singer. Songs are an elaboration of the story at the denouement. They reveal the morale to the audience in order to share the wisdom of the Elders. Songs convey the violation of an inhibition or the exposition of the violator. The performer sets the song apart from the narrative by using melody and rhyme such as alliteration and assonance, as well as by making the central participant speak direct speech.

The corpus shows two major subgenres: the dramatic **hwènùxó**, a narrative about the fate of human life, and the comic **yèxó**, a narrative that tells trickster stories, especially about the trickster **Ỳgbó**. Some comic trickster stories stage a different central participant. Both dramatic and comic stories refer to one of the 256 maxims of **Fa**. Finally, the song **hàn**, a genre in its own right, is a poetic narrative that is found in both subgenres.

The subgenre **hwènùxó** also involves more kinds of dramatic stories (Guédou 1985). However, the corpus has only a few of these, which does not facilitate a thorough analysis. The corpus also shows three **tàn** 'history of the clan', and one **núbàsó** 'dilemma tale'. Furthermore, the corpus has two 'amorous' stories.

In general, the majority of the previous publications on Dahomean storytelling were inclined to consider the stories to belong to a mythical genre that conveyed educational lessons. The performers of the corpus affirmed that the **hwènùxó** were true, and happened in a remote time. Considering all the arguments mentioned in this chapter, I consider the genre **hwènùxó** an indigenous performed genre that consists of dramatic and comic stories about gods, human beings and animals. The genre also includes songs that may accompany the stories. My working hypothesis is confirmed: **hwènùxó** is part of the verbal art of West Africa. **Hwènùxó** is an indigenous performed genre from the Fon of Benin.

Part 3: Structuring the discourse

Part 3: Structuring the discourse

The main objective of this part of my book is to explore how the performers structure the narrative discourse of the stories. In chapter 9, I will describe the details of the timing that the performers use to segment the discourse. The digitization of the corpus allows me to do a number of statistical calculations. I will discuss the multifunctional use and cohesive function of the particle **ǎ** in chapter 10. The discourse often shows the definite Fongbe particle **ǎ** that structures the discourse. The performers place the particle after noun phrases as well as at the end of an utterance that is an adverbial WHEN- or IF-clause. I will discuss in chapter 11 the structuring of the content. Finally, I will sum up the conclusions on the structuring of the discourse in chapter 12.⁶⁸

9. The timing of the speech act

During the recording of the stories, I often perceived the deliberate timing of the speech and the silences in-between by the performers. This chapter describes the timing of the speech act that governs the segmenting of the utterances. The digitization of the recorded stories enables a thorough analysis of this observation. The segmented utterances as spoken by the performers are at the base of my analysis. These segments accounts for the way the performers deliver a story. Serzisko's study on the discourse of the **Ik**, a people from northeast Uganda confirmed my perception, and therefore was very helpful to tackle this issue. He based his description on the segmenting of speech acts by pauses. He considered the pauses as the essential criterion to note how native speakers segment narrative discourse (Serzisko 1992: 4). In addition to the segmentation, I will also consider the function of pauses within clauses and between clusters of clauses. The performers use clusters of clauses that convey a clear-cut chunk of information. These clusters bear a close resemblance to the paragraphs that organize written texts. However, the word 'paragraph' is an appropriate description of the way the performers segment their speech (see chapter 19 The concept of the storyboard).

One of the main features of the utterances is that the the performers produce them whilst performing. Utterances are not analogous to clauses or sentences that consist of the lexical and grammatical items that create a syntactically well-formed and meaningful speech act. An utterance may consist of just a fragment of a clause, for example a noun phrase or a conjunction. It also often happens that a single adjunct or interjection, which expresses the performer's attitude, forms an utterance. The only category that cannot constitute an utterance is the Fongbe verb phrase. The

⁶⁸ The mode of speaking, and the question whether, and if so, to what extent, the performance is driven by the stories' intrigue or plot is discussed in the chapters about Style.

performers deliberately structure their discourse in utterances. This structured discourse intends to convey a story and its message.

Before embarking on my analysis, I want to make clear that the timing of the speech act primarily concerns the length of the pauses. The performer decides on the timing of speech and directs the length of pauses. The deliberate use of pauses in the performance is the opposite of faltering speech (see 11.2).The performance of Fongbe stories has nothing in common with the hesitant pauses that are characteristic of European conversation. In this respect, the performance of Fongbe stories widely differs from spontaneous conversation.⁶⁹

9.1. The pattern of pauses (statistical analysis)

This section discusses the pattern of pauses in the performance of Fongbe verbal art. The background of this approach is that the prosody of the discourse is tangibly audible, due to the silences between the utterances that segment each individual utterance. My working assumption is that performers use the variation of the lengths of pauses to structure the discourse by the skilful delivery of a pattern of pauses indicating, for instance, the end of a paragraph. The performer indicates the conclusion of a fragment of the story by inserting an extensive pause, as the statistical analysis will show.⁷⁰

Within the pattern of pauses, the performer also uses relatively long pauses to highlight the moments of special interest, such as the topic and the peak of the story, as well as flash forwards or cliff hangers. The pauses between utterances last between 0,1 and 4 seconds; the pauses that performers place after rhetorical phenomena last between 1,9 and 2,5 seconds.

I analysed the utterances and the length of the pauses of different versions of rather similar stories. Different performers at different villages performed these stories. I first analysed two versions of the same story known as ‘The sadist co-wife’. This story was told by two women: **Avɔsehwe Zomagba**, 37 years old, in Abomey-Calavi, May 4, 1976 (this story is referred to as Abomey-Calavi 2, AC 2) and by **Nagè Tokoudagba**, 80 years old, in Abomey, June 16, 1976 (this story is referred to as Abomey 5, A 5). I also analysed two versions of the story called ‘The day to thresh the millet’ (AC 4 and A 4).⁷¹ Finally, I analysed three versions of the ‘Cat and

⁶⁹ Several studies discussed the major features of conversation in European languages. These analyses show that conversation is a spontaneous speech act that goes with faltering speech and hesitant pauses (Deese 1980, Goldman-Eisler 1972 and 1985).

⁷⁰ The performers also use a particle in the clause that follows the extensive pause; I will discuss this in the section on tail-head constructions (10.1.).

⁷¹ A glossed version of the Abomey 4 story is to be found in appendix 2.

leopard' stories (Ay 5, AC 16 and A 7). The complete analysis involves seven stories that come to 9 403 words.

I transcribed the recorded stories in the utterances that segmented the performers' discourse. I used the software programme 'Praat' to digitize the original audio recordings (Boersma and Weenink 2007). This software visualises the sound waves that are represented on a time scale. This graphical representation makes it possible to measure in milliseconds the length of the utterance and the length of the pauses following that utterance. The number of syllables within each utterance stems from the transcription by simply counting.

The numerical data from each story consists of three series of quantitative (numerical) data: the length of the utterance in seconds (u), the number of syllables within the utterance(s) and the length of the pause following an utterance in seconds (p). The utterances and pauses are numbered with an utterance number (n).

These seven sets of numerical data stem from seven stories, from three different villages, each told by a different performer. This avoids the dominance of a specific (sub) dialect or the personal way of speaking of one storyteller. I consider the set of data of each of the stories to be independent of each other. The numerical data of each set can be analysed on specific patterns and deviations from the general patterns as well.

I calculated the Pearson correlation coefficient of the series of numerical data in order to determine a relation or a pattern between the different parameters (Anderson, Sweeney and Williams 1996). I used graphical representations to determine the linguistic significance of the numerical data. All techniques are commonly used in applied statistics.

The graphics and the probability analysis are made with the extensive statistical functionality of the spreadsheet programme that is part of the Microsoft Office Suite. The calculations have been verified with the SPSS statistical software. The results were identical.

Numerical and graphic analysis

Theoretically, there are several possible relations of the relevant parameters. It is likely that there is a relation between the length of the utterance and the number of syllables, since the more syllables an utterance has, the longer it takes to utter. There is also a possible relation between speech rate and pause length (where the speech rate of an utterance is defined as the number of syllables divided by the total duration). A third relation that should be considered is that of the length of the

pauses in relation to the length of the preceding utterances; both parameters are relevant in relation to the speech rhythm (Aalders Grool 2008).

Description of the statistical relations

Let us consider first the relation between the duration (length in seconds) of an utterance and the number of syllables. Figure 5 is a graphic representation of this relation in the Abomey-Calavi 2 text. Each dot in the scatter diagram represents an individual utterance.

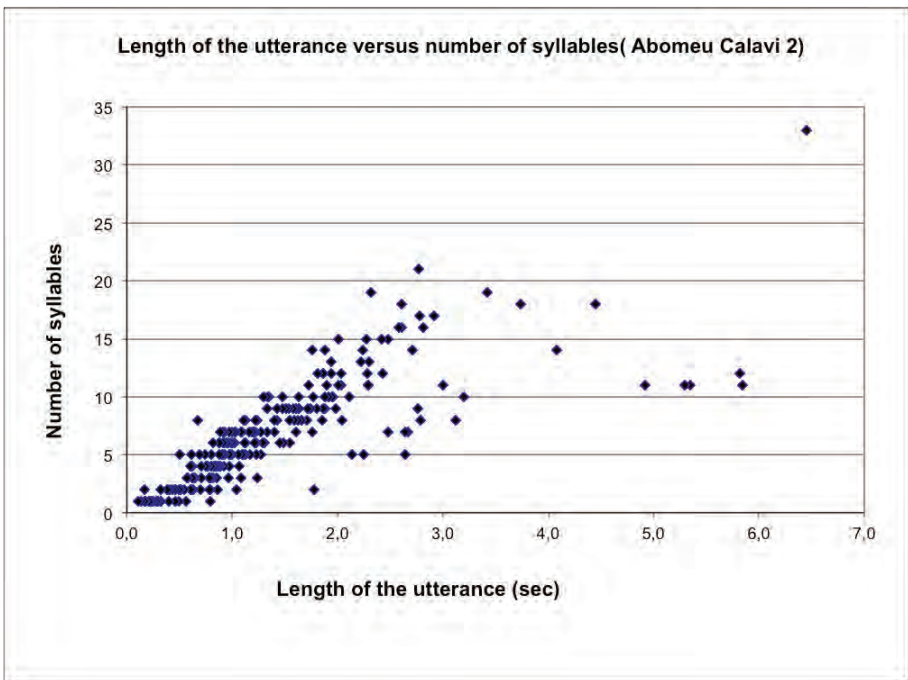


Figure 5 Length of utterances versus number of syllables

The graph 5 shows that when an utterance contains more syllables, the duration of the utterance is longer. More precisely, there is a positive relation between the number of syllables and the duration of the utterance, with a correlation coefficient of 0.84. This must be considered a 'good correlation'. The high correlation coefficient indicates an almost straight relation between the number of syllables and the duration of the utterance. The straight relation also indicates that the length of an utterance does not generally affect the speech rate. The speech rate of the performance is constant, and the cadence of the prosody is smooth.

There is no relation between speech rate and the length of the pauses, as is shown in figure 6. The Pearson correlation coefficient is a low 0.024.

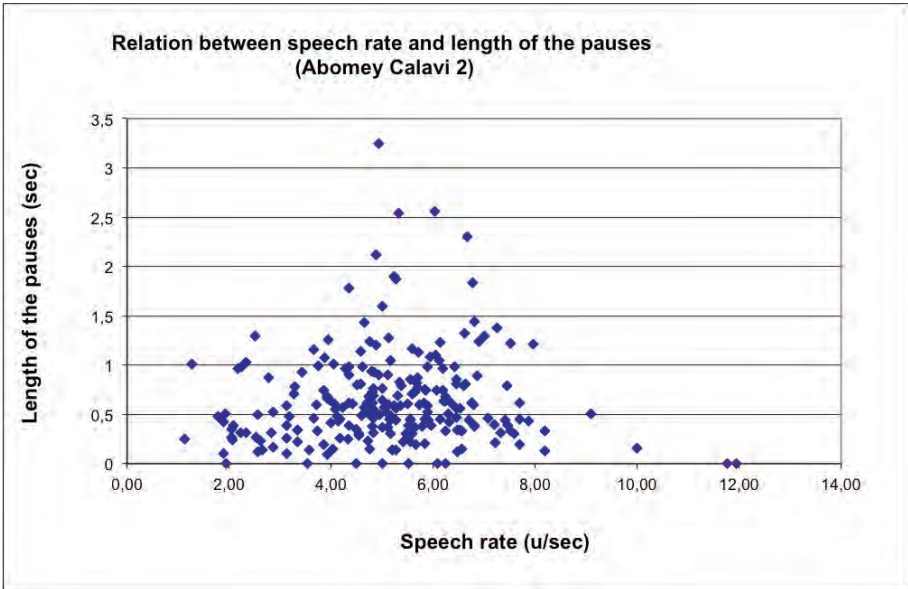


Figure 7 Speech rate and duration of pauses

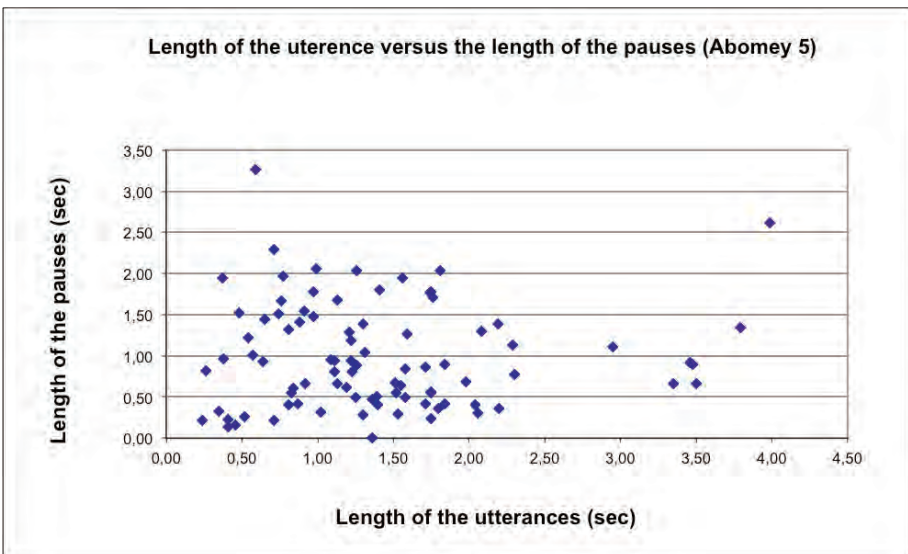


Figure 6 Utterances versus pauses AC 2

Next, figure 7 and 8 show that there is no relation between the length of the utterance and the length of the following pause in two versions of a similar story. The lack of a relation is supported by a Pearson correlation coefficient of respectively 0.016 and 0.049, which indicates that there is no relation whatsoever. Thus, the length of a pause is independent of the length of the preceding utterance.

The data further also show that the speech rate of a preceding utterance does not influence the length of a pause. As the scatter diagram shows, several utterances deviate from the general pattern (the points that represent the majority of the pauses and utterances). These exceptions have been analysed separately by checking their position and function in the story (see below in this chapter). The data discussed

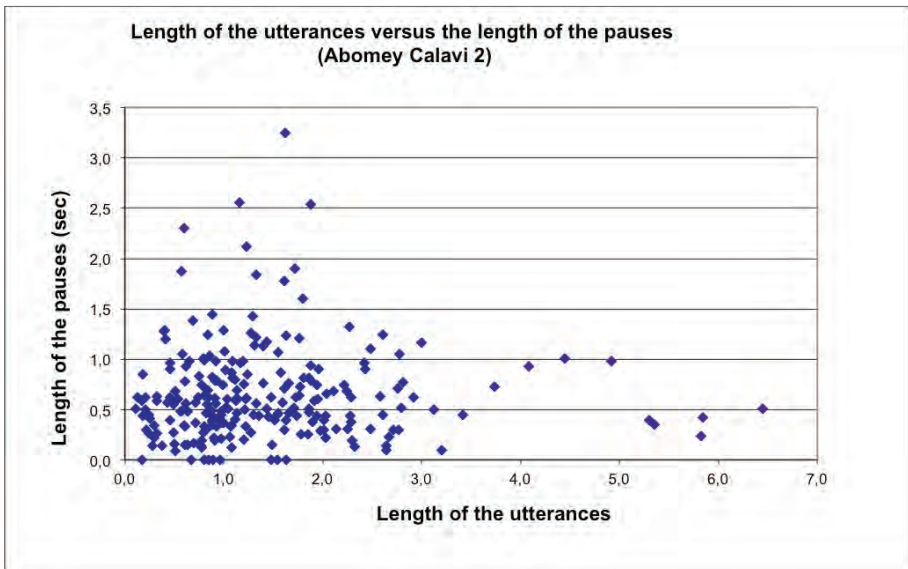


Figure 8 Utterances versus pauses A 5

here are representative of the corpus as a whole. They suggest that the length of pauses is independent of both the length and speech rate of a preceding utterance. This implies that the length of a pause can have a rhetorical function of its own, for example an indication of a specific phenomenon.

We may conclude that pause duration is a phenomenon that can be studied in isolation.

Pause duration

The length of the two editions of 'The sadist co-wife' considerably varies, probably due to the mood of the performer. The Abomey-Calavi 2 text consists of 234 utterances and 233 pauses. The Abomey 5 text consists of 89 utterances and 88

pauses. The performer from Abomey-Calavi extended the narrative discourse with the maximal recurrence of four repetitions (see chapter 17). The performer from Abomey just told a rudimentary version of the story, and added no digressions. The data of the analysed stories show the following pause lengths: the average pause duration is about 0.5 seconds. The length of most pauses is between close to zero and 1.5 seconds, as is shown by the data in figures 6, 7 and 8.

9.2. The pattern of pauses as a content marker

I will describe the different types of pauses that the performers use as shown in the graphics that represent the numerical data. The dots in the graphs are not data taken at random. They represent an utterance or a pause with a specific position in the story (see appendix 3). This makes it possible to check whether the position of an utterance in a graph can be related to a narrative phenomenon. For instance, this allows to distinguish between an underlying pattern of pauses, and pauses that are used in a specific situation in the discourse.

Figure 9 shows the length of the pauses that occur between the first 20 utterances of the Abomey-Calavi 2 text. The third paragraph of the Abomey-Calavi 2 text consists of the utterances and the pauses 14-19. The highlighted part of the text shows a pattern of pauses in which the successive pauses become longer. This paragraph is representative of the Fon performance of storytelling in general. The third paragraph of the Abomey-Calavi 2 text consists of the utterances and pauses 16-20 (see figure 9).

The content of this paragraph is given in the example below where the duration of the pauses is indicated between square brackets (in seconds). The paragraph starts with an utterance that summarizes the end of the previous paragraph, which ended

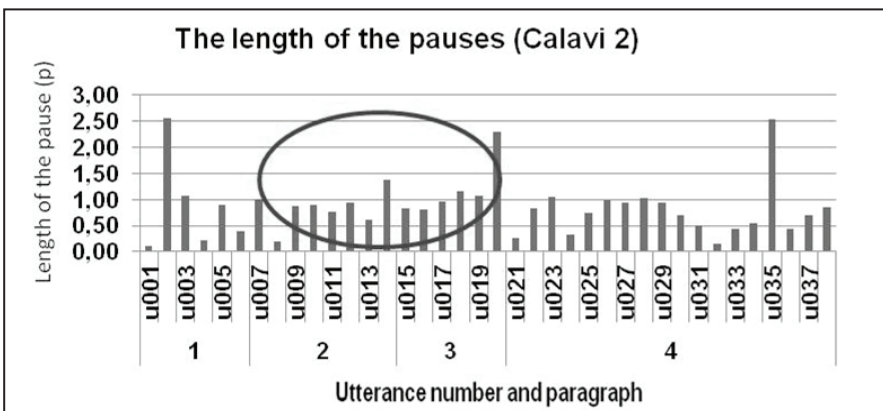


Figure 9 Length of pauses AC 2

with a pause of 1.38 seconds after the utterance ‘and was on her way to the market’. Note further that there is no personal pronoun; the performer uses the conjunction **bó** meaning ‘and’, which indicates that the clauses have the same subject. I will discuss the multifunctional use of the particle **ɔ́** later (see 10. and 11.2.). However, this paragraph exhibits a pattern of pauses in which the pauses successively become longer. The paragraph ends as it began, with the woman who cooked a delicious sauce before she went to the market.

(u 15) **bó yì áxǐ**

CJss go market

‘and she went to the market’ [0.83]

(u 16) **é xwè yì gbé ɔ́ é ɖà nùsúnnú ’ne ɔ**

CL₃ go go PURP TOP_{CL} CL₃ prepare sauce DEM_R DEF

‘before she left she cooked that very sauce’ [0.81]

(u 17) **ɖá nùsúnnú ’né ɔ́ ganjì bɔ́ nùsúnnú ɔ́ fé-wǔ**

prepare sauce DEM_R DEF well CJds sauce DEF dust-body

‘she was good at cooking that sauce. And the sauce was delicious’ [0.96]

(u 18) **bó ɖá dó zèn ɔ́ mɛ bó ka ɖu kpɛɖé**

CJss prepare put pot DEF LOC CJss but eat some

‘and she cooked it in the pot and, well, she tasted some’ [1.16]

(u 19) **bó jó é kpo ɔ́ dó**

CJss leave RES remain DEF put

‘and she put away the rest’ [1.07]

(u 20) **bó yì áxǐ**

CJss go market

‘and she went to the market’ [2.30]

‘(One day, one of the co-wives prepared her goods and she went as she always did to the market.) And she went to the market. Before she left, she cooked that very sauce, she was good at cooking that sauce. And the sauce was delicious. And she cooked it in the pot and, well she tasted some. And she put away the rest, and went to the market.’ [AC 2: 15-20]

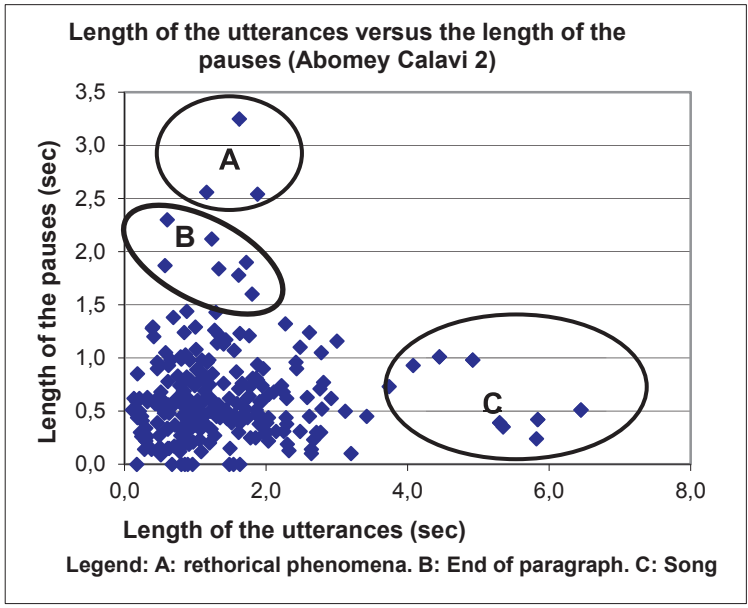


Figure 10 Rhetorical phenomena AC 2

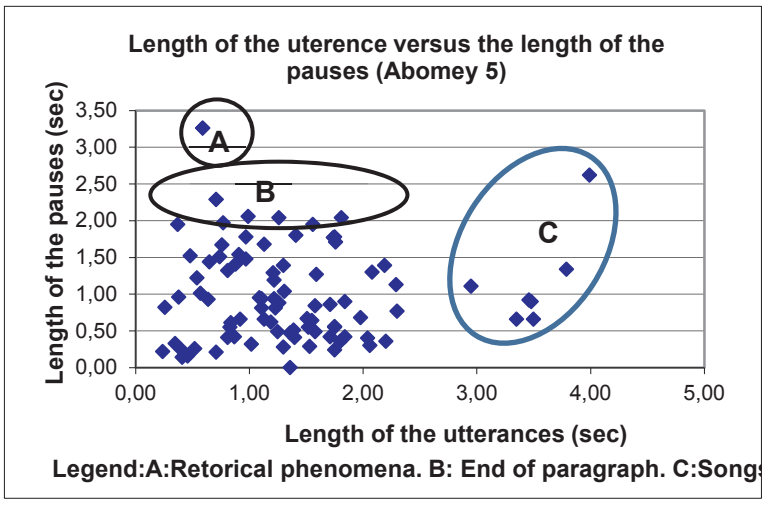


Figure 11 Rhetorical phenomena A 5

This paragraph is a deliberately marked chunk in the narrative discourse. This chunk affirms the analyses made by Serzisko, who stated that pauses are at the basis of the segmenting of the units of a speech act (Serzisko 1992: 84). There is a difference though with the statement by Serzisko who mentions the following: ‘Gründlage für die Segmentierung sind Pausen, die wir als Indikator für eine Intonationseinheit ansehen.’ On the contrary, the pauses in Fongbe indicate a kind of ‘punctuation’, for Fongbe is a tonal language instead of an intonation language.⁷²

9.3. Rhetorical pauses

All graphical representations of possible relations between utterances and pauses that have been discussed above display a number of outliers. Consider the figures 10 and 11, which show the same graphs as figures 7 and 8.

Closer inspection of figure 10 reveals three clusters of extensive pauses. These small clusters indicate moments of special interest. For instance, the end of paragraph (B) is indicated by a longer pause than usual (between 1.5 seconds and more). The other extensive pauses in cluster (A) do not occur at the end of a paragraph, but rather have a rhetorical function. These pauses are content markers that provide us with new information about the plot. The examples from the Abomey-Calavi text include the presentation of the main topic, a flash forward and the peak.

The examples taken from the Abomey text involve an extensive pause that indicates a cliff hanger (A) (see figure 11). The end of paragraph (B) is again indicated by a longer pause than usual. Notice, finally, that (C) in both graphs represents the songs in these texts, which, as can be seen, thoroughly differ from spoken discourse, apparently not alone for its melody. Below I will discuss these phenomena in more detail, using examples from both texts.

Pauses as indicators of the agents and the topic

The beginning of the story shows the formulaic start of **hwènùxó**. The second utterance starts the story by the introduction of the agents. This utterance is followed by an extensive pause. The third utterance reports the topic of the story.

⁷² This paragraph introduces the central participant in a flashback. The extensive pauses of the utterances 18 and 19 of this example do not function as paragraph markers, but instead indicate the rhetoric function of a cliff hanger.

hwenu-xó cé zòn m̀ gée bó yí m̀
 time-GEN.word POS₁ fly thus AJ CJss get find
 ‘my story took deliberately off to land on’ [0.10]

àsísí àsísí wè
 co-wife co-wife two
 ‘two co-wives’ [2.56]

b̀ yě d̀ wù hwán wè
 CJds 3PL AUX body jealous pFOC
 ‘and they were jealous’ [1.08]

‘This is a story about two jealous co-wives.’[AC 2: 1-3]

The performers use pauses to emphasize an important part of the story: the introduction of the agents and the topic.

Pauses as indicators of the peak

The fourth paragraph of Abomey-Calavi 2 introduces the jealous co-wife (Agent B), who sneaks into the hut of the younger wife and eats her lovely sauce. Here we find a clear pattern of pauses that is building up the peak. The peak ‘and she relieved herself in that sauce’ is followed by an extensive pause of 2.54 seconds.

é ś nǔ
 CL₃ take thing
 ‘she prepared herself’ [0.15]

é
 CL₃
 ‘she’ [0.44]

ván ỳnu t̀n
 open arse GEN
 ‘opened her arse’ [0.55]

bó nyè mǐ kón dó nùsúnnú ś m̀
 CJss relieve excrement pour put sauce DEF LOC
 ‘and relieved herself into that sauce’ [2.54, laughter of the audience]

bó nyè mǐ kón dó nùsúnnúzén 'né ́ mè
 CJss relieve excrement pour put saucepot DEM_R DEF LOC
 ‘and relieved herself into that very saucepot’ [0.44]

‘(When the first wife had eaten her fill,) she positioned herself over the pot, and defecated into it. ‘Ha, ha’ said the audience. (And she put the cover back...)[AC 2: 32-36]

Pauses as markers of flash forwards and cliff hangers

Performers use flash forwards and cliff hangers to increase suspense. Both these phenomena are followed by remarkably lengthy pauses. The flash forward is used to anticipate the plot of the story. The flash forward occurs in the midst of a paragraph, and may be uttered by the audience. The cliff hanger on the other hand, is used as an open-ended question at the end of a paragraph.

The Abomey-Calavi 2 text provides us with two fragments that show a cliff hanger and a flash forward. The first fragment is an example of a cliff hanger at the end of the paragraph, upon which the audience intervenes with a flash forward. Later in the story, the second co-wife looks for her saucepot in vain, and cries out the same utterance that this time is a cliff hanger at the end of the paragraph that is followed by the song of the central participant.

án é ná síte ́ é síte=kpó nùsúnnú-zén=kpó [1.32]
 MDM CL₃ IRM stand TOP_{CL} CL₃ stand=and sauce-GEN.pot=and
 ‘Look at this! When she would get up, she was stuck to the saucepot’
 [cliff hanger]

[the audience and the performer are laughing]

nùsúnnú-zén ví cè jǒèè-jǒèè [3.25] [flash forward]
 sauce-GEN.pot child POS₁ IP
 ‘My dear saucepot! Frizzle sizzle!’

‘(This time the first co-wife was stuck to the glued rim of the saucepot.) Look at this! When she would get up, she was stuck to the saucepot. ‘Ha ha’ said the performer and the audience. “My dear saucepot! Frizzle, sizzle!” said the audience. (The first co-wife tried to free herself from it, but her efforts were in vain)’ [AC 2: 128, 129]

nùsúnnú-zén ́ fi é ká [0.40]
 sauce-GEN.pot DEF place WH but
 ‘But where was her saucepot?’

nùsúnnú-zén ví cè jǒèèè-jǒèèè [0.50]

sauce-GEN.pot child POS₁ IP

‘My dear saucepot! Frizzle sizzle!’

‘(When the second co-wife returned from the market) she looked in vain for the saucepot, she cried ‘My dear saucepot! Frizzle! Sizzle!’ [AC 2: 159, 160]

Short pauses as markers of ‘Breaking News’

The performer’s speech becomes staccato when ‘breaking news’ to the audience. The staccato speech informs that there is new information that unravels the incident and accelerates the denouement: the pauses are much shorter than in the preceding utterances, up to 70 % shorter. The contrast between the peak and the denouement is huge. The change of prosody is audible when the agent switches from reported speech to direct speech, which entails the use of the personal pronoun ‘I’. This pronoun is hardly used in stories, but it occurs in the songs of the central participant and in an ‘interior monologue’ as the following example shows:

ø éí ká lé gó-sín bó wá jè
 ø DEM_N but repeat come-GEN CJss come.to fall
 ‘but where does this come from and floats down’ [0.30]⁷³

nùsúnnú-zén -mé nú mĩ
 sauce-GEN.pot-LOC LOC 1SG
 ‘in my saucepot in front of me’

un ka sú hɔn ce ’ne nya
 CL₁ but close door POS₁ DEM_R IJ
 ‘I shut my door, huh!’ [0.63]

hén

IJ

‘how come!’ [0.14]

été ka ðjè nya

WH but DEI IJ

‘Look at this! Now what is going on? Huh!’ [0.31]⁷⁴

⁷³ The performer utters an elliptical clause that omits the noun that is emphasized by the demonstrative pronoun.

⁷⁴ The interjection **nya** conveys disappointment.

‘‘Now what dirt did get again into my saucepot?’ she cried, ‘I shut my door, huh! How come! Look at this! Now what is going on? Huh!’ [AC 2: 46-49]

The first utterance in this example shows how the performer breaks off the first clause to emphasize the saucepot and its content in the second utterance. The second utterance continues, and the performer adds a new clause that provides us with new information ‘I shut my door’, and an emotional cry of disappointment.

9.4. The timing in songs

Songs are a genre in its own right, as I discussed in chapter 7. This is also shown by the relation between the length of the utterance and the number of syllables.

Figure 12 shows again that when an utterance contains more syllables, the duration of the utterance is longer. The scatter graph clearly shows that there are a limited number of exceptions. These involve the first and last lines of the songs. In the figures 10 and 11 the exceptions in cluster C also represent the relatively long utterances in a song.

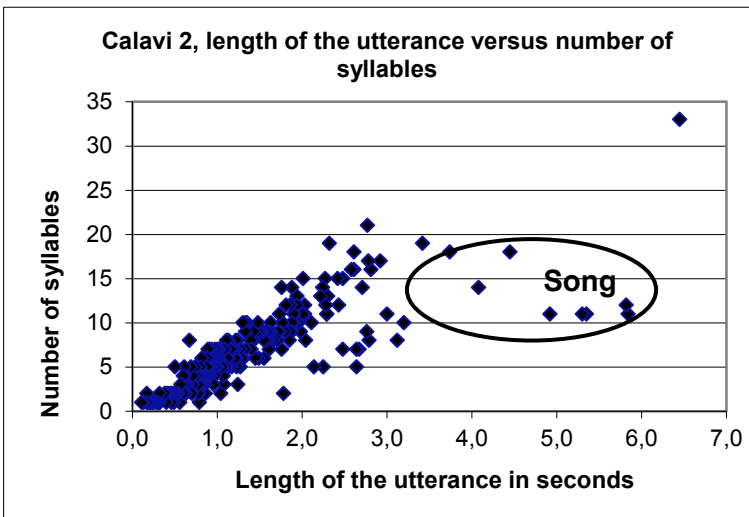


Figure 12 Songs AC 2

The performer mentions that she will sing a song, and the audience clearly recognises the song. One can hear the melody as well as a rhythm that differs from the spoken text in the performance. However, the numerical data do not offer a consistent pattern for all songs. One of the reasons is that a rhythm is not fully described by speech rate, length of the pauses or length of the utterance alone. Another reason is that songs differ one from another in timing and wording.

Nonetheless, the exceptional occurrence of relatively long utterances in songs is in line with the conclusion that the song is a different genre that the performers add to the discourse.

10. Structuring the discourse

The main purpose of the present chapter is to describe the structuring of the discourse by the multifunctional use and the cohesive function of the particle *ś*. Before embarking upon the description, I like to emphasize that I observed the language usage in the narrative discourse of the stories of the corpus. I analysed the occurrence of the particle *ś* in the same stories that I used to analyse the pattern of pauses: ‘The sadist co-wife’ (AC 2 and A 5), ‘The day to thresh the millet’ (AC 4 and A 4), and the three ‘Cat and leopard’-stories (Ay 5, AC 16 and A 7).

The use of the particle *ś* in the stories of the corpus is without doubt a fine example to show the difference between actual usage and observation based on elicitation. One of the main features of the particle is to convey that it connects old information with new information that is imminent. I define new information as an item that moves the story forward to a new development that does not result from the preceding part of the story.

The use of the particle is multifunctional, for the performers use it to topicalize clauses, nouns and noun phrases. I will describe the occurrence of the particle as a clause-final topic in tail-head constructions that indicate the transition to a new paragraph in the story. I will also describe the occurrence of the particle at the end of conditional and relative clauses. I will also discuss the use of the particle after the noun that denotes the central participant. Here, the particle is a definite marker that tracks and traces the central participant throughout the story. I will discuss the use of the particle after a noun phrase denoting an agent in the story to topicalize it. I will end this chapter with the topicalization of adjuncts that convey a change in scene. I will also make some additional comments on and corrections of existing grammars.

10.1. Tail-head constructions: the clause-final topic *ś*

This section analyses the function of the co-occurrence of the clause-final topic *ś* and a pause. The particle is structuring the discourse by a tail-head construction that separates two paragraphs and marks the transition to a new paragraph. The performer places the topic marker at the end of the clause that is the head of the new paragraph, and adds an extensive pause. The particle topicalizes the preceding clause. The function of the clause-final topic is to signal that the next utterances convey new information that moves the story forward. The tail-head construction marks the definite completion of a set of actions. Tail-head constructions occur in the following two ways: either they repeat the final clause(s) of a paragraph ‘tail’ in the first clause of the new paragraph ‘head’, or they summarize the complete preceding paragraph in the first clause of the new paragraph.

The head of a tail-head construction of a new paragraph is a subordinate clause that ends with the clause-final topic **ɔ**, which is followed by a pause. Actually, the clause grammatically is originally an embedded relative clause that has the noun ‘time’ as its antecedent (Guillet 1973 a: 68ff.):

hwènù dǽe
 time REL_O
 ‘the time that’

In narrative discourse, the clause is interpreted as a WHEN-clause. The narrative discourse often shows the following clause introducer whose antecedent is empty:

ø ée
 ø CI
 ‘when’ or ‘after’

The performers sometimes use the following relative pronouns as clause introducer: **ée**, **dǽe** and **è** ‘when’. Performers often omit the clause introducer, but they always use the final particle **ɔ** to topicalize the utterance. The WHEN-clause conveys the end of an action, and hence the next utterance, the main clause, conveys the beginning of a new action. Guillet mentions that the clause introducer is often used in speech. This is clearly distinct from narrative discourse in which the performers often leave out the clause introducer, and only use the clause-final particle (Guillet 1973 a: 68).

I will describe three examples of the tail-head construction that occur in the corpus. The first example is a tail-head construction that repeats the last clause of the preceding paragraph. The second example shows a tail that consists of two clauses. The last example shows a head that summarizes the preceding paragraph.

The Abomey-Calavi version of ‘Cat and leopard’ starts with a scoop on the agents, the two stepsisters, the leopard and the cat (AC 16). The leopard asks the cat to teach her to go hunting with both paws, for she herself is only capable of catching with her left paw. The cat agrees to show her how she goes hunting herself. She does not know that the leopard plans to attack her. The paragraph ends with the clause that the leopard suddenly hides from the cat. After the pause, the new paragraph starts with the clause introducer **ée**, and repeats the preceding clause ending it with the clause-final topic **ɔ**. The example shows that the end of a paragraph coincides with the end of an action; after an extensive pause a new paragraph follows that conveys a new action:

o kpɔ towɛ yĩ wu nú awũ [1.46] ‘Tail’
 IJ leopard POS₂ go hide LOC cat
 ‘your leopard hid from the cat’

éɛ kpɔ yĩ wú nú awũ ɔ́ [1.18] ‘Head’
 CI leopard go hide LOC cat TOP_{CL}
 ‘when the leopard hid from the cat’ (AC 16 :41, 42)

The Abomey version of ‘The day to thresh the millet’ provides us with the next example (A 4). This tail-head construction shows the repetition of two clauses that indicate the transition to the new paragraph. The third utterance repeats the first two clauses of this example, and ends with the clause-final topic ɔ́:

é dà yɔkpɔ ɔ́ [2.72] ‘Tail’
 3SG marry virgin DEF
 ‘he married the young girl’

b’é wá yĩ xwé [1.24] ‘Tail’
 CJss.CL₃ come get house
 ‘and he returned home’

é dà yɔkpɔ ɔ́ wá yĩ xwé é ɔ́ [2.71]
 CL₃ marry virgin DEF come.to go household RES TOP_{CL}
 ‘after he married the young girl, he brought her back home’ ‘Head’

asi tòn [2.58]
 wife GEN
 ‘his wife’

wá kan byɔ ɖɔ ji lé [0.33]
 come.to question ask say CP like
 ‘asked a lot of questions, such as’

‘He married the teenager, and returned home. He took her home with him after the marriage. His first wife asked a lot of questions, such as ...’ (A 4: 21-25)

The third utterance of the above example is the head of the new paragraph. It confirms the accomplishment of the two actions stated in the last two clauses of the previous paragraph: the marriage is a fact. The first wife is upset.

The third example is from the Abomey-Calavi edition of ‘The day to thresh the millet’ (AC 4). The example shows the peak of the story, and a tail-head summary construction in the second utterance of this fragment, that summarizes the reported speech of agent B in the preceding paragraph. The clause-final particle ɔ́ is used as a

topic marker in the head of the paragraph and summarizes the previous paragraph: **dǎ mǎ**, ‘to say thus’. The resumptive pronoun **é** in the second utterance of the example is the object of the clause that summarizes the content of the preceding paragraph. Performers in Abomey often use this combination.

ně dǎ dǎ dè ná kpé wè [4.39] ‘Peak’
 penis INDF AUX SPEC IRM meet pFOC
 ‘a man would marry another one’ [laughter]

é dǎ mǎ é ǎ [1.76] ‘Tail-head summary’
 3SG say thus RES TOP_{CL}
 ‘when she said so’

yè wá dǎ
 3PL come.to arrange
 ‘they arranged’

o li só-’zán [0.98]
 IJ millet thresh-GEN.day
 ‘oh the day to thresh the millet’

‘The King would marry another man! Ha, ha! When she said this now, they arranged the day to thresh the millet.’ (AC 4: 89-92)

The performers in Ayou often summarize the previous paragraph in the head of the new paragraph by the following clause that uses the remote demonstrative pronoun **ené**:

ené ǎ
 DEM_R TOP_{CL}
 ‘after that happened’, ‘in that case’

Let us finally consider the tone of the clause-final topic **ǎ**, which has an inherent high pitch that it is influenced by the immediately preceding tone. The two following changes occur: the high tone of the clause-final topic **ǎ** is slightly falling after another high tone; the tone remains high when it follows a low tone, but the low tone is rising to a mid-tone. The adaptation of tone of the clause-final topic **ǎ** is exceptional in the Fongbe tonal system where the clause-final particles have fixed tones, for example the question particle **à**, or the negation particles **ǎ** and **ó**.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ The performers of the corpus rarely nasalize the particle in a nasal context (see 10.6.).

10.2. Extensive information in conditional and relative clauses

Conditional and recurrent relative clauses that provide us with new information also use the clause-final topic. These clauses are rather rare in narrative discourse. However, for the sake of completeness I will give a few examples.

The particle is used as a clausal topic at the end of conditional clauses. The following example is from one of ‘The day to thresh the millet’ stories (AC 4). The newly wedded bride of the ‘Great Spirit’ god **Dada Ségbó** is a boy who wants to change into a girl, before the ceremony of threshing the millet. He and his husband go to see the diviner who tells them to prepare a sacrifice when they make sure that the waterlamp continues to burn. The sacrifice consists of 41 pieces of porridge topped with red palmoil **wǎ** ‘porridge’ and white chicken meat. The first utterance starts with **ényi** meaning the conditional ‘if’ and ends with the clausal topic **ś** in the following example:

ényi ta sin-myɔgbén ś cí ś
 IF light water-GEN.fire.clay.jar DEF go.out TOP_{CL}
 ‘if the light of the waterlamp did not continue to burn’

é kún ná wá xwé o [1.34]
 CL₃ NEG IRM come.to house NEG
 ‘he should not come to the house’

bo ná ta ami-myɔgbén ɖokpó
 CJss IRM light oil-GEN.fire.clay.jar one
 ‘and he should light an oil lamp’

ami-myɔgbén ś ci ś é kún wà nù
 oil-GEN.fire.clay.jar DEF go.out TOP_{CL} CL₃ NEG do thing
ɖé ó
 INDF NEG
 ‘if the oil lamp did not continue to burn, it did not matter’

sin-myɔgbén ś ná ɖò-tè
 water-fire.clay.jar DEF IRM stand
 ‘as long as the water lamp would continue to burn’ [AC 4: 129 – 133]

Performers rarely use relative clauses in their performance, except for the accumulation of a number of recurrent relative clauses that provide us with new information. I give an example of four successive relative clauses of which the fourth one finally gives new information: the bride in question is a man (AC 4). Notice the rhetorical effects of the recurrence in the following example:

yè wá yì Daá-gón bó dǔ jì lé dǎ [0.81]
 3PL come.to go Dada-GEN.dwelling CJss say CP like INDF
 ‘they arrived at Dada’s palace and said that this here’

nǔ dǎ [0.33]
 thing REL
 ‘that poor thing’

asì dǎ é dá wá xwé gbé ǔ [0.45]
 wife REL CL₃ marry come.to house PURP TOP_{CL}
 ‘this wife to whom he got married’

dǎ nyònú ǔ [0.21]
 REL woman TOP_N
 ‘that this woman, you know’

dǎ nè-nó wé mɛ’jì [0.62]
 REL penis-GEN.owner aFOC sorry-IQ
 ‘that she was a man, do you mind me saying this?’

Daá dǔ émí kún tuun ó [0.81]
 Dada say LOG NEG know NEG
 ‘Dada said that he did not know’

‘They arrived at Dada’s palace, and said that this here, that poor thing, this wife to whom he got married, that this woman, you know, that she was a man, do you mind me saying this? Dada said that he didn’t know.’ [AC 4: 94-99]⁷⁶

⁷⁶ The examples show the usage of the performers that differs from the description for example by Lefebvre. Lefebvre remarks that **dǎ** or **dǎ-è** is the combination of a nominal operator and a resumptive pronoun (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 118 f., 170 f.). However, the reported tonality does not occur in the corpus that shows the relative pronoun **dǎ** to convey the function of an object. Other correct forms are **dǎ** and **é**; these are used when the relative pronoun refers to **hwe**: **hwedǎnu** and **hweénu** that are WHEN-clauses.

10.3. The central participant: the definite marker ǎ

In the first two sections of this chapter, I discussed the function of the particle ǎ as a clause-final topic marker. The performers place the marker at the end of the clause that is the head in the tail-head construction, which characterizes the transition to a new paragraph in the story. Besides being the topic marker of clauses, the particle is also the marker that indicates the definiteness of nouns. Note that the particle has a multifunctional usage, for it features in clauses as well as in noun phrases.

In this section, I will discuss the use of the particle as definite marker of nouns and noun phrases. Performers place the particle after the noun that indicates the central participant in the story. Here, the particle is a definite marker that tracks and traces the central participant, his paraphernalia and aliases throughout the story, until the denouement. This usage facilitates the audience to recognize the central participant.⁷⁷ The function of the definite marker ǎ is similar to that of the clause-final topic, in so far that it also refers to old information and conveys that new information is imminent.

The central participant in hwènùxó

This section discusses the use of the definite marker to identify the central participant in the dramatic **hwènùxó**. The performers introduce the central participant by adding the definite marker ǎ to the end of a noun phrase that indicates the central participant. The definite marker ǎ is used, whether the central participant is an object or a god from the supernatural world. The central participant in ‘The sadist co-wife’ for example, is the sauce and the saucepot in which the sauce is cooked. The following noun phrases occur:

nùsúnnú ’né ǎ
sauce DEM_R DEF
‘that sauce’

nùsúnnú ǎ fé-wǔ
sauce DEF dust-body
‘the sauce was delicious’

nùsúnnú-zén ’né ǎ
sauce-GEN.pot DEM_R DEF
‘that saucepot’ [AC 2]

⁷⁷ I will discuss the tracking function in 11.2., when I will describe the use of the flashback to introduce the central participant.

The following example again stems from the story ‘The day to thresh the millet’ (AC 4). In this story, the Great Spirit god **Dada Ségbó** marries a boy, whereupon the first wife starts slanderous talking. At the same time, she proposes to arrange the day of the ceremony to thresh the millet. This ceremony obliges the participants to be naked. The story refers to **Sakpata**, the deity of fertility and smallpox. The metaphor of smallpox and millet is obvious; for smallpox causes a skin rash and blisters on the face that very much resemble the small millet grains. Malignant smallpox often was a fatal disease in the past. The Fon thought that **Sakpata** was responsible for both the illness and the growth of cereal crops. The use of the definite marker **ǎ** shows that the millet is an alias of the central participant in the following example:

o mě wè e nɔ nò bo nɔ dó só
 INTERJ nakedness aFOC CL₃ RM stay CJss RM put grind
 ‘oh! One took off one’s clothes and was always naked for threshing’

só li ǎ ná
 grind millet DEF LOC
 ‘for threshing the millet’

‘One had to take off all one’s clothes for the ceremony you see, one was always naked for the threshing ceremony, for threshing the millet.’ [AC 4: 112, 113]

Let us consider how the definite marker indicates the successive aliases and paraphernalia of the central participant ‘the old man who is surrounded by a bushfire’ (AC 6). The following example stems from a story about the orphan and two kings, the king of the country of his father and the king of the country of his mother:

caki ǎ
 bag DEF
 ‘the bag’

zunkan éné ǎ
 forest DEM_R DEF
 ‘that bush’

dàwé ’né ǎ
 old.man DEM_R DEF
 ‘that old man’

alɔké ǎ
 ring DEF
 ‘the ring’

In the beginning of the story, the orphan is rewarded a bag filled with sand, after he worked a year in the fields of the king of his father's country. He leaves on a journey to his mother's country, and he encounters the old man who is in the midst of a bushfire. The orphan puts out the fire by throwing the sand. The old man rewards him by giving him a ring that fulfils all his wishes; and so the orphan becomes a rich man (AC 6).

The central participant in the comic *yèxó*

The definite marker *ǎ* also tracks and traces the trickster *Yǎgbó* as the central participant in the comic *yèxó* stories. The Fon people believe that *Yǎgbó* is neither human nor divine, though he is the only central participant who travels between the earth and the sky.

The following example is from 'The first story', the story about the Great Spirit god *Dada Ségbó* and his three daughters (Ay 2; see 6.5.). *Yǎgbó* is introduced, but without the definite particle *ǎ*. When the performer tells that he secretly watches the king who hides three objects, the performer adds the definite marker to his name. From then on, the trickster is the central participant who wants his stepbrother *Ahwansoblenǎ* to win the contest. Note that the language is *Ayizogbe*; it slightly differs from Fongbe:

adǎ-nǎ yɛ-gbó éyé ǎ wi yǎ
 web-GEN.owner Yɛ-big AP₃ TOP_N darkness TOP_{CL}
 'when the voracious big Yogbo himself hid'⁷⁸

The following example is from the story in which *Yǎgbó* plans to make a fortune by exporting salt to the House of Rain that is situated in the Land of Sky (Ay 3). The trickster and all his paraphernalia and aliases are marked by the definite marker *ǎ*. The performer uses the definite marker before the trickster starts his flight to the Land of Sky, and continued to use it until the trickster is exiled from Sky for stealing food that was meant as an offering to the gods. Anyone who browses through this story will find amongst others the following examples that refer to the aliases and paraphernalia of the trickster:

adǎ-nǎ yǎ-gbo towɛ-yǎ
 web-GEN.owner Yo-big POS₂-TOP_N
 'your voracious big Yogbo' (the beginning of the story)

⁷⁸ I will discuss the specific meaning of the epithet *adǎnǎ* in section 14.1. Here I give the translation that the Segurola and Rassinoux dictionary proposes.

'ne ɔ́ gangan ɔ́
 DEM_R DEF harrier-hawk DEF
 'that one there, that harrier hawk'⁷⁹

adɔ-vlɔ 'né ɔ́
 white.beans-puree DEM_R DEF
 'that far away white beans puree' (the cement of the houses in the Land of Sky)

atácíci ené ɔ́
 fritters DEM_R DEF
 'those yummy peppery fritters' (the food in the Land of Sky)

me-ɖaxó ɔ́
 person-big DEF
 'Mr Big' (the start of the denouement)

Notice, there is no difference between the use of the particle to indicate the central participant and its properties in dramatic and comic stories.

10.4. Topicalization: the presentation of the agents

This section covers the use of the particle as the topic marker of a noun phrase. The performers also use the particle after a noun phrase denoting an agent in the story to topicalize it. The performers topicalize a noun in a single utterance that ends with a pause. The following utterance conveys referential identity, for it starts with a clitic personal pronoun that refers to the same agent. Topicalization is an indication that one of the agents is about to take an action that moves the story forward. The utterance that follows the topicalization always starts with the subject personal pronoun *é*, in the following example 'she'.

é wá jè gbe ɖokpó b̀ [0.76]
 CL₃ come.to fall day one CJdd
 'until one day and'

nỳɖnú ɔ́ [0.93]
 woman TOP_N
 'this woman, you know'

⁷⁹ The bird is the huge African harrier hawk that does not know that he carries the trickster to the Land of Sky.

é sɔ́ axi-nú [0.62]
 CL₃ take market-GEN-thing
 ‘she prepared her goods’

bó ɖɛ́dó axĩ [1.38]
 CJss set.forth market
 ‘and she was on her way to the market’

‘Until a day came and this woman, you know, she prepared her goods, and she was on her way to the market.’ (AC 2: 11-14)

The performers in Ayou use the particle **ɔ́** as a topic marker that identifies the pair of agents in the first utterance at the beginning of the story. The second utterance indicates a property of the agents.

awĩ ɔ́ kpɔ́ ɔ́ [0.84]
 cat DEF leopard DEF
 ‘this is about the cat and the leopard’

nɔ̀-vi nɔ̀-ví wè na ɖé [3.44]
 mother-GEN.child mother-GEN.child aFOC give AUX
 ‘they were sisters’

‘This is a story about the cat and the leopard, they were sisters.’ [Ay 5: 1, 2]

The introduction of the agents in Ayou resembles the opening credits of a movie picture: Starring A and B.

10.5. Topicalization of adjuncts: change in scene

Performers topicalize a change of circumstances by using an adjunct followed by the topic marker **ɔ́**. The adjunct is a circumstantial marker that makes a change in scene and sets the frame for a new development. Here the pauses become intermittent and are sporadic. The formula is the following: {**AJ** + **ɔ́**}. The following adjuncts are used in the corpus: **din ɔ́** ‘now’, **tróló ɔ́** ‘immediately’, ‘as soon as’; **tegbɛ ɔ́** ‘always’; **kpóun ɔ́** ‘simply’.

In one of the ‘Cat and leopard’ stories, the leopard kills all her children but one. She finds out that the cat hides her children, and asks her for an explanation. The cat is nervous, and fabricates a story (AC 16). The following example shows how **kpóun ɔ́** is used to introduce a new scene:

é ma gbɔ́jé aji [0.35]
 CL₃ OPT relax IQ
 ‘that she wanted to take a nap’

que [0.32]

CP (French)

‘that’

émí ná ɖ'áɓ vǐ lé wú kpóun ɔ yě bǐ nó
 LOG IRM put-hand child PL GEN-body simply TOP_{ΔJ} 3PL QF RM
hɔn yǐ aza jǐ [0.34]
 flee go ceiling LOC

‘when she simply tried to catch the children, they all escaped on the ceiling’

émí kún nó mò vǐ ɖé ó [0.55]

LOG NEG RM find child INDF NEG

‘that she did not find a child’

‘That she wanted to take a nap, that, when she simply tried to catch the children, they all escaped upon the ceiling, that she did not find a child.’ [AC 16: 168-171]

Topicalization occurs also to comment on the preceding fragment, for example, **nùgbó e**, or **nùgbó ɔ** ‘really’.⁸⁰

vǐ ɔ ɖò émí kún nó lè wǔ ɖò gba.wun.gba ó [0.12]
 child DEF say LOG NEG RM wash body be cover.look.cover NEG
 ‘the child said that he did not bath in public’

ɖé kózún-mè émí nó lè wǔ ɖè
 CP earthen.loft-LOC LOG RM wash body AUX
 ‘that he always bathed in the earthen loft’ [flash forward] [1.82]

a ɖò ɖǐdó wema-mɛ wɛ à ɖé kózún-mè émí
 2SG AUX set.off paper-LOC pFOC Q CP earthen.loft-LOC LOG
nɔ lè wǔ ɖè [0.76]
 RM wash body AUX

‘Did you write this down? That he always bathed in the earthen loft’

nùgbó ɔ [0.11]

truth TOP_{ΔJ}

‘and so it was’

‘The boy said that he did not bath in public, he always bathed in the earthen loft. Did you write this down? He always bathed in the earthen loft. And so it was.’

[AC 4: 65 -68]

⁸⁰ **nùgbó** is translated into ‘really’. It literally means ‘thing big’.

10.6. Further remarks

In this section, I will first give a summary of the use of the particle **ᓃ** in the corpus. I will discuss whether the descriptions in the available grammars match with my analyses of the use of **ᓃ** in the second part of this section.

Summary of the use of the particle **ᓃ**

The particle **ᓃ** has two distinct functions. The clause-final topic has the function of structuring the discourse. It indicates that a clause has the specific content of ‘action accomplished and there is a new action pending’. The definite marker **ᓃ** functions also as a marker of referential identity, for it is used to trace nouns and noun phrases. The marker connotes ‘Please note, here he is, the central participant’ or ‘Watch out! One of the agents is out for disaster’. It is noteworthy that the particle does not occur in songs. The table below summarizes the use of the clause-final topic.

Preposed WHEN-clauses		
	Clause Introducer	Clausal Topic
	ée ø ᓃé è	ᓃ

Preposed IF-clauses		
	Clause Introducer	Clausal Topic
	ényí nú	ᓃ

Embedded relative clauses in reported speech		
Antecedent	Relative	Clausal Topic
NP Object	ᓃée ée è	ᓃ

Figure 13: The clause-final topic

No show of the definite marker within narrative discourse

With the exception of the introduction of the agents at the beginning of a story, as well as introduction of the central participant and his paraphernalia, all other nouns in the performance go without a noun phrase-particle. This last practice is analogous to daily speech. Performers enumerate the stereotypical set of objects of wealth without using the definite particle **ɔ́**. The imaginary list sounds like a formula, for the list is similar in the stories where it occurs. Here one should expect the use of the phrase-final particle, because the listing consists of objects ‘we know of’, or, at least, ‘we long for’. This does not happen, as is shown by the following examples: the story of Abomey-Calavi 6 shows the following wishes of the central participant: **singbó** ‘a two-storey house’, **sika** ‘gold’, **kanlin** ‘animals’, **akwé** ‘cowries’ or ‘money’ and **dokun** ‘wealth’. In Abomey-Calavi 3 there is the following list: **akwé** ‘cowries’ or ‘money’, **avɔ** ‘large wrappers’, **sika** ‘gold’, and **Hwawé sɔ́** ‘a strong male horse from Hwawè’. ‘The day to thresh the millet’ story in the Abomey-Calavi edition shows the transformation from a boy into a girl. Before she goes to the palace to attend the ceremony to thresh the millet, she asks the king the following items: **avɔ** ‘large wrappers’, **nùsáwu** ‘smoothing balm’, **púdrù** ‘powder’, **palfen** ‘perfume’, **bebè** ‘a large waistband with beads’ (AC 4). Each of the performers draws up a similar list of desirable objects. Here, the definite marker does not occur. The performer emphasizes that these objects remain a wish for most people, and are thus indefinite.

Match with existing grammars

A survey of the available Fongbe grammars shows that they provide us with the rules of the use of the particle in embedded relative clauses, and in subordinate WHEN- and IF-clauses that precede the main clauses (Guillet 1973 a: 63-72; Anonymous 1982: 100-104; Höftmann 1993: 161-169; Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 161ff., 170ff.). Ameka described the use of discourse particles in Ewegbe (Ameka 1991).

However, I see a subtle divergence between the descriptions in the available grammars and the language usage of the performers. I will discuss the following items: the function of **ɔ́** as clause-final topic and the use as a definite marker of a noun. Finally, I will comment on and the nasalization of the particle **ɔ́**.

Let us return to the pattern of pauses. The performers end a WHEN-clause with the clause-final topic **ɔ́** that is followed by an extensive pause. The WHEN-clause is the head of a tail-head construction, which is one of the relevant features of the discourse. The grammar of Guillet is the only source that confirms the relation between the clause-final topic and the accompanying pause, ‘une pause de la voix’

that he transcribed by a comma (Guillet 1973 a: 62). The more recently published grammars do not mention the use of a pause after the clause-final topic. The performers also place the clause-final topic at the end of IF-clauses, as well as at the end of REL-clauses that frame a range of recurrent remarks. Previous grammars and textbooks showed that these clauses start with the clause introducer *éé* ‘when’ or *ényí* ‘if’ (Guillet 1973 a: 69ff., 72ff.). The performers of the corpus often omitted these clause introducers in their performance.

Performers also place *ǎ* after nouns and at the end of noun phrases as the definite marker that tracks and traces the central participant and his paraphernalia throughout the story until the denouement. They also use *ǎ* as a topic marker that may denote one of the agents. The noun as a topic constitutes one single utterance; the next utterance is a simple SVO-clause that starts with a clitic personal pronoun that has referential identity with the noun. Finally, performers use the particle after adjuncts that set the frame for a new development. Here, the occurrence of a pause is not obligatorily, it depends on the choice of the individual performer. Adjuncts indicate the transition to a new scene: ‘now’, ‘immediately’, ‘the day rose’, ‘the next morning’, ‘the next evening’, ‘I am speaking the truth’ and so forth.

The performers distinguish the clause-final topic *ǎ* from the definite marker *ǎ* by adding a pause to the clause-final topic. The data of the corpus are pertinent. The extensive pause after the clause-final topic in the head of a tail-head construction is required, and the rule applies obligatorily. These tail-head constructions function as the content markers of the story. However, the introduction of the central participant is an exception. The performers introduce the central participant in a flash back (see 11.2.). This utterance consists of two clauses: a subordinate clause that ends with the clause-final topic, which is followed by the main clause that introduces the central participant that is indicated with the definite marker *ǎ*. Performers sometimes add a pause. However, that individual choice depends on the individual performer.

The grammars by the missionaries also described the use of the particle that the performers place after nouns and at the end of noun phrases. Guillet compared this usage with a type of ‘definite article’ that he called ‘le déterminatif’ and translated into a definite article (Guillet and Dujarier 1973, *Déterminants*: 6). Anonymous copied the leaflets by Guillet and Dujarier, but he changed the translation into ‘in question’ (Anonymous 1982: 35). Höftmann copied the description by Guillet and Dujarier (Höftmann 1993: 116). Lefebvre copied Anonymous and called the particle ‘the definite determiner’, and translated it into ‘in question’ or ‘that we know of’ (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 36).

Lefebvre stated that Fongbe has one single definite determiner. The clausal definite determiner is the same determiner that occurs in nominal structures, but the function is different. Lefebvre concluded that the determiner shares a number of properties in

all contexts where it appears (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 501f.). Lefebvre underlined the gloss of the clausal definite determiner **ǎ** to distinguish it from the nominal definite determiner **ǎ**. Actually, the clause-final topic is a clause particle as my observations on the tail-head usage showed. The clause-final topic functions as a content marker. The same observations are to be found in Höftmann (Höftmann 1993: 167). The definite marker is a noun marker that functions as a referential marker.

Lefebvre also argued the double occurrence of the definite determiner in simple clauses (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 481ff.). Lefebvre gives several examples of a double occurrence of **ǎ** in simple clauses that are spoken by three different types of Fongbe speakers. The corpus does not show any sample of this type of language usage at all.⁸¹ Therefore, I cannot discuss the argument.

Nasalization

Let us consider the nasalization of vowels in the corpus. Notice a salient fact that I did not mention before: all performers pronounce the clause-final topic **ǎ** in the head of a tail-head construction as a clear vowel **ǎ**, even in a nasal environment.

A careful listener to the recordings of the corpus will hear a perceptible difference between grammar rules and the usage in the corpus, particularly in the field of nasalization. In Fongbe, the vowels **ɛ**, **i**, **ɔ**, **u**, and **a** mutate depending on their morphological environment. All vowels within the context of the nasal consonants **m** and **n** are nasalized with the exception of the inhibition marker **ma** (see 15.1.). Nasalization occurs within a single word. It also happens if the adjunct at the end of a clause is a single vowel. Native speakers and the performers of the corpus always nasalize for example, the interrogative adjunct at the end of a direct question: **à** like in **a fǎn à** ‘Hello. How are you?’. The last **à** is pronounced [àn]. The National Language Commission decided in favour of omitting the final consonant in the orthography of words with a nasal consonant (see p. 25). This pronunciation is obvious to Fongbe native speakers who, for example always say [myðn] for **myð** ‘fire’.

Nonetheless, there are a few exceptions to this rule. The performers of the corpus never nasalize the clause-final topic **ǎ**. They rarely nasalize the definite marker **ǎ** after a noun in a nasal context: **myð ǎ** is pronounced [myðn ǎ]. Notice also that the performers never nasalize the negative clause-final adjuncts **ma**, **ǎ** and **ó**, even in a nasal context. The corpus shows that nasalization of the definite marker **ǎ** is not a rule, but an individual choice that depends on the way of speaking of the performer.

⁸¹ Recall that the corpus consists of 57 000 words.

As a result, the performers of the corpus do not confirm Lefebvre's statement that the definite determiner *ɔ* is modified into *ɔn* when the preceding noun ends with a nasal vowel or in the context of a nasal consonant (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 28, 37).

Concluding remarks on the particle *ɔ*

The role of the topic together with the pause is crucial in narrative discourse. The particle *ɔ* is the clause-final topic that transforms that clause into a temporal adverbial clause. At the same time, the particle is the last spoken item of a clause that ends with a pause that is a content marker, for the length of the pause depends on its position in the plot of the story. The length of the pause is extensive after the head of a new paragraph, and after rhetorical phenomena like the peak. Tail and head together form the transition to a new paragraph; they convey that the story moves forward. The content of the head clause conveys the end of the action in the previous paragraph. The clause-final topic marks the spot where new information is imminent. The corpus shows that the performers make a difference between the usage of the clause-final topic in subordinate clauses and that of the definite marker in a noun phrase. Moreover, the performers do not nasalize the clause-final topic at all. They rarely nasalize the definite marker. Finally, the corpus does not show any sample of the definite determiner in simple clauses (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 481ff.).

On the other hand, the corpus shows that the performers sometimes omit markers and particles, for example the omission of the focus marker *wè* in the permuted form of the non-perfective marker, and the omission of the clause-final topic after the negative *ǎ*. A minority of the performers, especially those in Ayou, leave out *ɔ* when they use the negative particle *ǎ*. On the contrary, the performers in Abomey use the combination of {*ǎ* + *ɔ*}, that is [NEG + TOP_{CL}] at the end of an utterance, for example: *ǎ ɔ*.

The performers of the corpus use the particle in subordinate clauses and in noun phrases. The use of the particle *ɔ* in stories is without doubt a fine example of the difference between actual usage and observation based on elicitation. One of the main reasons is that the performer sets the decor by structuring the discourse. Here, *ɔ* obviously plays a major role in linking together information and framing the transition to a new development in a story. Grammars propose examples of independent and context free clauses and sentences to explain the categories and the construction of a language. In my experience, the descriptions until now are not complete for leaving out narrative discourse, or usage within a context. Therewith, the descriptions unfortunately neglected the crucial role of the particle, where it sees to the consistency of the discourse.

In general, the majority of the grammars that I discussed in chapter 1 are in line with my description of the multifunctional usage of the final particle **ǎ** in the corpus.

Lefebvre (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002) made several observations that do not match with the usage in the corpus, and therefore requires some additions and corrections.

11. Structuring the content

In the two previous chapters, I described the major features that are structuring the discourse: an intricate pattern of pauses supports the clause-final topic **ǫ** to structure the discourse. The multifunctional use of the topic and the definite marker **ǫ** underline the actions in the story. In the present chapter, I will describe other features that the performers use when structuring the content. I will describe the syntactic and pragmatic functions in the discourse, which are the use of movement and non-movement verbs, and the alternation of direct speech and reported speech. Furthermore, I will discuss the rhetorical phenomena of the performance. The chapter ends with an analysis of the way of speaking of the audience.⁸²

11.1. Discourse features of **hwènúxó**

The performance of the **hwènúxó** is a current speech event that reports events that happened in the past or that might have happened in the past. Performers choose how they present the succession of the events that compose the story. The performers frequently use the bare verb that the French missionaries called ‘le narratif’ that has an aoristic aspect and conveys the past and the present (Guillet and Dujarier 1973: Verbe 4). They present the events in a logical order, which is the order that they estimate optimal to stage the performance. However, this logical order is not necessarily the chronological order of the events.

The performers use movement and non-movement verbs to convey the past actions and events. They use SAY-verbs to relate the reported speech of the agents. The performer uses static and dynamic verbs in the song of the central participant.

Movement and non-movement

The performers use movement-verbs to convey a movement, and they use non-movement-verbs to convey a state (see 1.1.4.). It is obvious that the majority of the verbs in stories are movement-verbs. Movement-verbs convey the movement from one place to another place. They are also giving new information about the actions that move the story forward. The narrative discourse uses movement-verbs to underline the movement of the agents: ‘to go to a place’ or ‘to come from a place’. The following verbs are frequently used: **yĩ** ‘to go’, **wá** ‘to come to’, **nyĩ** ‘to throw’, **yĩ** ‘to get’, **gbɔn** ‘to go past’ and so on. The end and the start of a paragraph often show the occurrence of the verb ‘go’ in the tail-head construction that links paragraphs (see 10.1.).

⁸² The analysis of pauses and the description of **ǫ** show that the structure of songs differs from the narrative discourse. This ‘code switching’ is described in Style, in 15.2.

Performers use non-movement-verbs as **ɖò** ‘to be without moving’ and **nɔ̀** ‘to stay’ to convey quietness and stability. However, the unfolding story proves the contrary, for the disturbance is imminent. When the performer for example says ‘she left the saucepot in the hut’, the audience knows that something is bound to happen (AC 2).

Dujarier was the first author who used the concept of non-movement- and movement-verbs: ‘Le mouvement et le non-mouvement s’expriment par les verbes.’ (Guillet and Dujarier 1973: 1, *Mouvement et Position*). This concept is appropriate to the categories of verbs that have the lead in the narrative discourse.⁸³

Performers express space by a specific combination of a verb phrase plus a noun phrase. They add a locative noun to a minimal Serial Verb Construction (SVC) of motion verbs that semantically encode the trajectory, for it is inherent to the verb’s meaning. The VP consists of a motion SVC that consists of two verbs. The location is conveyed by a NP that consists of two nouns of which the second noun indicates the specific location. The translation in English or French shows that a locative noun is a preposition.

Let us consider two passages that show the pleonasm of a SVC and a position noun. The first fragment stems from ‘The sadist co-wife’. It depicts the eldest co-wife who wants to eat some of the sauce of the second co-wife, and therefore enters her hut. The example shows the combination of the minimal serial verb construction **yí byó** ‘get enter’ that conveys the movement together with the locative noun **mè** ‘interior’:

bó yí byó xɔ́ ɔ́ mè [0.74]

CJss get enter hut DEF LOC

‘and the first co-wife entered the hut of the younger co-wife’ (AC 2: 25)⁸⁴

The second fragment depicts the second co-wife who returns from the market in the evening, and wants to fetch her sauce that she cooked that morning. She is about to discover that somebody spoiled her sauce. The minimal SVC and the locative noun in the first utterance convey the movement **yí zé** ‘to get lift’. The second utterance shows the irrealis marker **ná**, and a minimal split SVC ‘**zé (nùsúnnú) ɖó** ‘lift (sauce) apply’ which indicates the movement to the indirect object that is followed by the locative noun **jí** ‘top’:

⁸³ See also Style, 13.2. the role of the non-perfective marker; 13. 4. the locative marker, and 14.2. the adjunct **din ɔ́** that has the function of a deictic marker that signals a new action in the chronology of the story.

⁸⁴ Note that the adjunct **gbè** ‘in’ is used instead of **mè** after the nouns **xwé** ‘house’, **azǎn** ‘day’, and **glé** ‘field’.

bó yí zé nùsúnnú.zén [0.60]

CJss get lift sauce.GEN.pot
‘and she fetched the saucepot’

bó ná zé nùsúnnú d’ado ji ɔ [0.44]

CJss IRM lift sauce put.on.fireplace LOCTOP_{CL}
‘and when she would lift the sauce to put it on the fire’

o mì kó dò lin-gǎn dò [0.56]

IJ faeces OSM be long.time-big be
‘oh the big excrement had already hardened in’

nùsúnnú-zén mè [0.37]

sauce-GEN.pot LOC
‘inside the saucepot’

‘And she fetched the saucepot; and when she would lift the sauce to put it on the fire, oh! the big excrement had already hardened, it was floating in the saucepot!’
[AC 2: 41-44]

The SVC **yí wá** ‘go come to’ plus the noun **asá** ‘leg’ or ‘thigh’ conveys the meaning ‘at the foot of’, ‘under’ as the following example shows:

é yí wá atín-’sá ɔ [0.47]

3SG go come tree-LOC TOP_{CL}
‘when she arrived under the tree’ [AC 16: 257]

The SVC **flé sìn** ‘fall off’ plus **ji aga**, which is an accumulation of two nouns that both mean ‘top’, describe the deadly fall of the leopard:

é flé sìn loko-ji-aga

3SG fall GEN iroko-LOC-LOC
‘she fell off the uppermost top of the iroko tree’ [AC 16: 317]⁸⁵

Finally, the noun **dò** ‘hole’ means ‘down’, for example in **nyì dò**.

bò yè zé gedε nyì dò [0.53]

CJds 3PL lift chain throw LOC
‘and they threw the chain down’ [AC 16: 323]

A special example of spatial motion is the Fongbe verb **nǎ** ‘to give to’ that is also used as the locative noun **ná** or **nú** ‘for’ that precedes the indirect object personal

⁸⁵ Note that Fongbe grammar has neither comparative nor superlative.

pronoun **é** ‘him’ or ‘her’. The performance shapes the combination to **n̄i** ‘for him’ or ‘for her’ (see the example on p. 173f., and appendix 2: A 4: 97, 99, 142). The gliding tone consists of an ascending tone that falls at the end of an utterance and therefore is followed by a pause. The following locative nouns also occur: the noun **gǔdò** ‘back’ conveys ‘behind’. The noun **àkpá** ‘side’ means ‘next to’. The noun **àsí** ‘hand’ conveys ‘in possession of’ or ‘with’. The noun **nukòn** ‘forehead’ means ‘in front of’. The noun **gbě** ‘hunting’ or ‘fishing’ is used as **gbé** and conveys a purpose or an intention.

Direct Speech and Reported Speech

The performers use direct speech to tell the successive actions and events of the story. On the other hand, the agents speak in reported speech. The agents do not speak with one another, for the performers stage them in successive separate paragraphs. Let us recall that agents are no characters, but a function or a status (see 5.3.). The performers place their first encounter at the denouement that shows a dialogue in reported speech, when the agents blame one another for the incident. The central participant who is the only character in the stories uses direct speech in songs.⁸⁶

Performers deliver the reported speech in complement clauses that express the remarks or opinions of one the agents. The complement clause is preceded by verbs, like **ɖɔ** ‘say’ or **tuun** ‘know’, henceforth I will call these verbs ‘SAY-verbs’. SAY-verbs use complementation: ‘the woman said that she went to the market’, or ‘she said that she went to the market’.

The construction of complement clauses is the following: {SAY + complementizer}. Complement clauses in storytelling lavishly enhance the construction, for the following versions occur: **ɖɔ ɖɔ** and **ɖɔ ji**, or **ɖɔ (ɖɔ) ɖé** or simply **ɖɔ**. The stories show many variations that differ from the existing Fongbe grammars. Guillet noted **é ɖɔ nú n̄i ɖɔ** ‘he said to me that’ (Guillet 1973 a: 50). Höftmann noted **m̄ɛsí ɖɔ nú ví lé ɖɔ jí** ‘the teacher said to the children that (...)’ (Höftmann 1993: 195). Lefebvre noted **é ɖɔ nú m̄i ɖɔ** ‘he said to me that’ (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 116).

The complementizer **ji** is the indirect discourse particle **ji** that marks insistence; it is also used as the final particle of an indirect question (Segurola 1968: 35). In the performance, **ji** has the function of the complementizer of the SAY-verb, and as the

⁸⁶ The central participant does hardly speak in public, which is in line with the expected cultural behaviour of powerful people; but the central participant may sing a song, see chapter 15.

clause introducer of the subordinate clause. The particle has the two following forms when it is used as a final particle: **aji** or **deji**.⁸⁷

The performers express negation in different ways, depending on the use of direct or indirect speech. Simple yes/no clauses use the common negative particle **ǎ**. In indirect speech, the performers use the following periphrastic constructions:

{**kún** + V + **ó**}
{NEG + V + NEG}

Or

{**ma** + V + **ǎ**}
{NEG + V + NEG}

Performers use these constructions also in embedded clauses, for example:

é wá é dḡ émí-lé kun ko yì xḡ gudo
CL₃ come CL₃ say LOG-self NEG already go hut LOC

bo yi lè wǔ lóló ó
CONJss go wash body even NEG

‘she finally said that she had not yet gone behind the hut, and had not yet bathed’

[AC 4: 218]

The performers place the final particle **ace**, or **'ce** after a vowel, at the end of an utterance, if the speaker expects a negative answer.

The performers in Ayou who spoke **Ayizogbe** also used the negative particle **ǎ** in yes/no-clauses. However, they used the following negative periphrastic construction in indirect speech:

{**ma** + V + **gé**}
{NEG + V + INS}
‘not at all’, ‘absolutely not’

The logophoric pronoun **émi** plays a vital role after SAY-verbs. The logophoric pronoun indicates the referential identity of the person who speaks or thinks with the subject of the reported speech. This is often ‘he’, ‘she’, or ‘they’ (Guillet 1973 a: 50ff.; Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 78ff.). In the scene that follows the

⁸⁷ The assumption that **aji** is a combination of ‘the question particle adjunct **à** and the noun **ji** ‘top’ {**Q** + **on**} is ill founded (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 158). The noun **ji**, ‘top’, takes the meaning of the preposition ‘on’ only in postposition after another noun, when it has the function of a locative, for example **atin ji** ‘in the tree’ (see also 13.4.).

denouement, the guilty agent may use the logophoric pronoun **émi** in the breaking news scene.

The performer refers to the pair of agents either by their function or status, or by a personal pronoun.⁸⁸ Previous grammars exhaustively described the personal pronouns. Fongbe personal pronouns have the following three forms: clitic, anaphoric, and logophoric. The pronominal clitic is preferred in daily speech. Performers often use both the clitic and anaphoric pronoun: **é** or **éyé**, that is ‘he’ or ‘she’ to refer to the agents: The pronominal clitics **un** ‘I’ and **a** ‘you’ are seldom used in the narrative discourse. This is because of the difference between conversation and narrative. In narrative, one uses the third person, whilst speech uses ‘I’ and ‘you’.

On the other hand, the pronominal clitics **un** ‘I’ and **a** ‘you’ are often used in the songs by the central participant (Ay 2, AC 1, AC 2, AC 4, AC 7, AC 19, A 3, A 4). The anaphoric pronoun **nyé** ‘I’ sometimes occurs in songs and in the rare monologues (AC 9, A 5). The anaphoric personal pronoun **hwi** (2 SG) is also used (AC 4, A 4). The possessive pronoun is also used (AC 7, A 3). Even the plural **mi** ‘we’ occurs, for example in the song of the termites (Ay 7, AC 4, A 4).

11.2. Rhetorical phenomena

This section discusses the rhetorical phenomena that the performers use to highlight specific utterances that announce a major development in the story. I will show that the performance of storytelling uses a number of rhetorical phenomena as a way of speaking.

The structure of the plot of a story becomes visible in the plot points as the peak and the denouement. The structure appears also in the arrangement of utterances, for example in a flashback, a flash forward or a cliff hanger (Todorov 1966: 139; Hart 2011: 11ff.). A number of performers use the flashback to introduce the central participant. Furthermore, the stories show two rhetorical devices that intensify suspense: the flash forward and the cliff hanger. I described these devices in the chapter about pauses (see chapter 9).

⁸⁸ The section about the agents, for example ‘the king of the country’ discusses statuses and functions (see 5.3.).

The introduction of the central participant

The performer introduces the central participant in the main clause that immediately follows an adverbial clause that pictures a flashback. Notice that this WHEN-clause ends with the clause-final topic, but that the utterance continues. Notice that the performer does not insert a pause after the clause-final topic, but continues speaking, and launches the central participant whilst tagging him with the definite marker *ǎ* to make sure that the audience takes in that this information is relevant. The performer deliberately leaves out the pause to emphasize the flashback that introduces the central participant. The following example shows the flashback that introduces the central participant in the third paragraph of the story of ‘The sadist co-wife’:

bó ǎǎdó axì [1.38]

CJss set.off market

‘and she was on her way to the market’

bó yì axì [0.83]

CJss go market

‘and she went to the market’

ée xwè yì gbé ǎ é ǎǎ nùsúnnú ’né ǎ [0.81]

CI go go PURP TOP_{CL} CL₃ prepare sauce DEM_R DEF

‘before she left, she cooked that very sauce’

ǎǎ nùsúnnú ’né ǎ ganjì bò nùsúnnú ǎ fè-wǔ

prepare sauce DEM_R DEF well CJds sauce DEF dust-body

‘she was good at cooking that sauce. And the sauce was delicious’ [0.96]

bó ǎǎ dó zèn ǎ mē bó ka ǎǎ kpeǎǎ

CJss prepare put pot DEF LOC CJss but eat some

‘and she cooked it in the pot and, well, she tasted some’ [1.16]

bó jó é kpo ǎ dó [1.07]

CJss leave RES leave DEF put

‘and she put away the rest’

‘And she was on her way to the market. She went to the market. Before she left, she cooked this sauce, cooked this delicious sauce. And the sauce was delicious. And she cooked it in the pot, and well, she tasted some and put away the rest.’ [AC 2: 14-19]

In this example, the first utterance shows the last utterance of the second paragraph of the story. The new paragraph starts with the repetition of the previous clause. The

third utterance is a flashback to bring to mind that the woman cooked a sauce before she left. The performer indicates the introduction of the central participant by the omission of the pause after the clause-final topic **ǎ** and by placing the remote demonstrative pronoun and the definite marker after the relevant noun {**ené** + **ǎ**}. The performer acknowledges the entrance of the central participant as *pars pro toto*: the sauce. The fourth utterance repeats the crucial clause, and adds that the sauce is delicious. The fifth utterance of this example introduces the saucepot, and the last utterance of the example is a flash forward of the role of the saucepot.

The peak

The performance starts with a small number of paragraphs to introduce the agents and the topic. Then the entrance of the central participant and his qualities go on stage. Soon the central participant meets with an incident that compels him to act. This is the peak of the story. The peak sets the story in motion. The sequences after the peak teach us how to deal with the world. Therefore, the action rises, and the actions follow one after another in an increasing pace that only stops at the denouement, which is also the end of the story.⁸⁹

The performance requires a careful timing that I explained in the chapter about pauses (see 9). The performer partitions the telling of the upcoming incident by splitting up the actions of the pair of agents. Let us consider for example, the story of ‘The sadist co-wife’ when the performer tells the audience the almost trivial detail that Agent A cooks a sauce before she goes to the market (AC 2, A 5). These actions, cooking and going to the market, seem to have no link with the topic of jealousy that the performer told in the introduction. On the other hand, when the performer continues and comments on the sauce as a delicious spicy sauce, the sauce and the saucepot, in which the sauce is cooked, are marked by the definite particle **ǎ**. At that very moment, the audience gets the message that the saucepot is the central participant, and that somehow a dramatic incident will happen to the sauce and the saucepot. Let us look at the following example that shows the peak of the Abomey-Calavi version of ‘The sadist co-wife’:

é sǎ nǔ [0.15]
 CL₃ take thing
 ‘she positioned herself’

⁸⁹ The Fongbe **hwènùxó** has one action peak. The didactic or thematic peak that Longacre described does not occur in the corpus (Longacre 1990: 8).

é [0.44]

CL₃

‘she’

ván yɔnu tɔn [0.55]

open thigh GEN

‘opened her arse’

bó nyè mĩ kɔn dó nùsúnnú ɔ mè [2.54]

CJss throw excrement pour drop sauce DEF LOC

‘and she defecated into that lovely sauce’ [laughter] [AC 2: 32-35]

The example shows that several rhetorical devices prepare the peak. Let us consider the details within the utterances, to start with the clause that precedes the peak. The performer separates the subject, the clitic personal pronoun, from the rest of the verb phrase and makes it an independent utterance to get full attention of the audience by building suspense. Notice that the caesura that splits the subject from the verb is very unusual in Fongbe. The peak has a serial verb construction (SVC) that consists of three verbs that express a movement downwards. Performers use a SVC in a story to indicate damage, catastrophe or death. SVC is the putting together of three or four movement verbs to express the peak. A lengthy pause follows the peak. The definite marker tracks the delicious sauce as the central participant.

The denouement

The denouement is the ultimate momentum that releases the central participant from the wicked actions of the culprit. The central participant shows his divine power in the denouement. The denouement is a moment of dramatic tension. The performer changes the prosody of the performance either by announcing a song, or by ‘breaking news’. The performer sometimes performs a song sung by the central participant to disclose the denouement (see 15). The song is followed by a long series of ‘breaking news’ utterances in 50 % of the stories. The ‘breaking news’ sequence starts with the denial by the culprit agent (B) in the form of a monologue. The victimized agent (A) angrily interrupts, and here, the pair of agents engages on a dialogue, which is the only dialogue of the story. The speech rate is fast and staccato. The effect of this part of the performance is close to the anchor that is breaking news in a television broadcast when a crisis is building up. The dialogue jumps from agent B to agent A, and is uninterrupted by pauses. However, the audience understands clearly, which of the two is speaking, for Fongbe has the logophoric pronoun **emi** (see 11.1.).

Minor rhetorical phenomena: suspense

Performers also use a number of phenomena that create suspense. Suspense occurs in the flash forwards and cliff hangers that I described in the chapter about pauses (See 9.2.6.). The performers often insert a cliff hanger at the end of the paragraph. Some performers anticipate the denouement by inserting a flash forward. The performer delivers the majority of the flash forwards and the cliff hangers. It is remarkable that the audience also uses the minor devices in interaction (see 11.3.). The audience incidentally interrupts the performer by a flash forward, or, less frequently, by a cliff hanger.

11.3. The interaction with the audience

I described the interaction with the audience in the section on the performance (See 3.4.). In this section, I will describe the features of the interaction with the audience when it joins in the performance.

The interactions with the audience are diverse, the contributions being either reactive or proactive. The audience chimes in, asks questions but also sets the pace of the ongoing story. On the one hand, the language consultant is the organizer of the session, and amiably shows his pleasure. He often is the spokesperson who appreciatively comments, after the performer challenges him to do so, for example by producing a long pause after naming the agents at the start of the story.

On the other hand, the present colleague performers are ready to set the pace. They interrupt the performer by joyously repeating the last utterance, and by asking superfluous questions. They sometimes express their consternation at the events of the story, and they even take the lead by delivering a flash forward.

Hence, it appears that the interactions with the audience show two distinct paths, of which one is reactive, and the other one proactive. The reactive interruption emphasizes the lead of the performer by the approving remarks or the laughing of the audience. The proactive intervention drops a hint or gives a cue to encourage the performer. On the one hand, the reactive path is part of the performer's timing. The performer may challenge the audience with a long pause that provokes the audience to a reaction. On the other hand, the proactive path interferes with the performer's timing, for it promptly silences the performer. The digitized sound files show no registration of pauses at all at the moment of a proactive reaction, and points out a clear interruption of the performer. The reactive interruption triggers the audience, whilst the proactive intervention encourages the performer. The interruptions of the audience disturb the pattern of pauses, which is one of the major features of the mode of speaking of the performer.

The interaction shows that the mode of speaking of the audience widely differs from spontaneous human conversation (see p. 118). On the contrary, the way of speaking of the audience is a strictly organised participation. The analysis of the performance of the corpus shows that the studies that suggested that the analysis of conversation in European languages might be helpful to analyse verbal art, prove to be wrong (Reuster-Jahn 2005: 163).

I may also add that there is a cultural difference in the appreciation of silence. People in Western Europe and people in Benin have a different attitude towards silence. In Europe, people feel uneasy when a conversation falls silent. Let us consider analogous expressions in several European languages, such as the French ‘un ange passa’, and the Dutch ‘er ging een dominee voorbij’ meaning the English ‘there was a lull in the conversation’. Conversation means that one must talk to another and that it is even impolite to be silent. In Benin, this is not the case.

The way of speaking of the audience makes clear that the performer is in control of the performance, though it requires the interaction of the audience. The performer has a fit of laughter when delivering an utterance, which makes the audience to roar with laughter, for example at the peak of the story. The performer decides on the singing of a song, whereupon the audience may join the chorus. Some performers even kept an eye on the foreign guest, when they remarked ‘Did you write this down?’, and ‘the **yovó** is laughing!’.

12. Conclusions on the structuring of the discourse

I pay attention to the details in the oral production of the utterances when analysing the corpus, since the performance is a speech event. The details have to be a verbatim picture of the utterances of the performers. The main features that structure the discourse are the pattern of pauses, the multifunctional use of the particle *ś*, and the discourse features such as the use of verbs that move forward the story, the rhetorical phenomena and the way of speaking of the audience.

The performers of the corpus are audibly structuring the narrative discourse. The analysis of the digitized transcriptions shows that the performance is a speech event that consists of utterances and silences between the utterances. The main feature of the utterances is that they often are part of a clause, for the performers intentionally insert caesurae. The performers convey the story either by a single isolated utterance, or by a chunk of information in a set of utterances or even a paragraph. Utterances in the corpus consist of clauses or sentences, as well as noun phrases, clause introducers, conjunctions, adjuncts and comments by the performer.

Theoretically, there are three relevant parameters: the length of the utterance, the speech rate and the length of the pause following an utterance. The length of an utterance depends on the number of syllables within the utterance. The speech rate does not change during the performance. The length of the pauses is not dependent on the length of the utterance. The length of the pauses is not influenced by the speech rate either. Conclusively, the length of a pause does not depend on the length of the preceding utterance, neither on the speech rate. This implies that the length of a pause has a function of its own. Consequently, the length of the pause that follows an utterance is a phenomenon that can be studied in isolation. Within a story, the length of the pauses shows variations. The pattern of pauses builds up from short pauses to longer pauses within each paragraph. The pattern of pauses is consistent. The pattern of pauses tags the end of a paragraph with an extensive pause.

The data further show that the performers use also extensive pauses to highlight rhetorical phenomena. The peak of the story is followed by a long pause. The use of a flash forward or a cliff hanger involves also long pauses in all the stories of the corpus. In short, performers use pauses as content markers that highlight new information, such as a new paragraph or a rhetorical phenomenon that moves the story forward.

Performers use also short pauses that are up to 70% shorter than the pauses of the preceding utterances. These staccato utterances mark two phenomena: the 'breaking news' utterances of the denouement and the rare interior monologues of one of the agents. Here, the performer often switches to direct speech.

The structuring of the discourse by the pattern of pauses is comparable to the way punctuation indicates the structuring of a printed discourse. This also is an indication that the pauses in the performance are necessarily a tool to segment the discourse.

The definite particle *ǎ* is a multifunctional particle because it determines clauses as well as noun phrases. Performers use the clause-final particle *ǎ* to topicalize the preceding clause in a tail-head construction that indicates the beginning of a new paragraph. Here, the particle *ǎ* is used in conjunction with a long pause. The performers use the definite particle *ǎ* also to topicalize a preceding noun. This happens for example in a stand-alone utterance that marks one of the agents: ‘the other woman’. The next utterance starts with the personal pronoun that refers to the identical agent. Performers also use the particle *ǎ* to track and trace the central participant of the story throughout the story. The multifunctional use of the particle *ǎ* in the performance of Fongbe stories appears a meaningful increase of the syntactic and pragmatic functions compared to descriptions in previous analyses of Fongbe grammar.

The narrative discourse of the stories uses movement and non-movement verbs. The tail-head constructions and the use of movement and non-movement verbs within the paragraphs move the story forward. Temporal indicators as ‘the next morning’ or ‘in the evening’ also mark the advancing of the story. The performer uses direct speech to tell the successive actions and events. Performers relate the speech of the agents in indirect speech, which they express by SAY-verbs and logophoric pronouns. The central participant uses direct speech when singing a song to disclose the denouement.

The described pattern of rhetorical phenomena is consistent throughout the corpus. The performance shows that each story has one peak. Performers use flash forwards and cliff hangers to keep the audience in suspense. The accomplished performers use a flashback to introduce the central participant.

The performer is also free to insert songs in the performance. The central participant sings the song in direct speech. The statistical analysis shows that songs have only very short pauses. The definite particle does not occur in songs.

The interventions of the audience are part of the speech event. This consists of interventions that have nothing in common with West-European conversation. The objectives of the audience are dual: either the audience reacts on an issue in the narrative, or it proactively interacts with the performer. The performer may challenge the audience by a relatively long pause to respond and to express appreciation. The audience proactively interferes in the performer’s speech and disturbs the pattern of pauses.

Part 4: Style in verbal art from Benin

Part 4: Style in Fongbe verbal art

In this part of the book, I will describe style in **hwènùxó**. Style depicts the poetic function that conveys the orientation of the utterance, or the performer's attitude towards what she or he is speaking about (Jakobson 1960: 356). The performance is a way of speaking that increases the freedom of the language use of the performer. I will start with the description of the grammatical choices that the performers make. These choices include the aspect and mood of the verbs, and the non-perfective verbal marker that highlights the topic of the story. Next, I will describe the individual choices that the performers make to colour their performance with a personal touch. Finally, I will discuss the stylistic devices that occur in the songs.

13. Grammatical choices

The grammatical choices in style often regard the function of the verb. Fongbe is an aspect rather than a tense language. The stories in the corpus have a number of verbal markers. Verbal markers indicate aspect or mood and prefix to the bare verb. I will describe the aspect and mood markers, and the non-perfective marker that marks the topic in all the stories. I will discuss the specific serial verb constructions and their use in the peak and in the pleonastic or idiomatic expressions that convey motion and position.

13.1. Aspect and Mood: action and comment

Performers use an aspect or mood marker to colour a verb phrase in the performance of storytelling. Aspect and mood are used at the level of the clause. Performers use aspect markers to change the meaning of a verb phrase. They use mood markers to show the beliefs and intentions of the central participant.

Aspect markers

The performers use four aspect markers that convey the nature of an action. These markers convey frequency, recurrence and rearrangement of the chain of events. The marker **nó** marks a habit. The performers use the marker **nó** to tell a routine action. The markers **lɛ** 'repeat' and **vɔ** 'reiterate' underline the repetition of an action. Performers often combine the two markers **lɛ vɔ** to indicate superabundant and

recurrent actions. The marker **ko** marks the rearrangement of the chain of events and underlines the out-of-sequence aspect.⁹⁰

The routine marker

The marker **nó** indicates the frequency of actions and conveys that these actions are a routine. The marker is translated as ‘always’. The following example shows the routine marker in the reported speech of an interior monologue:

mè ká nó wà éló nu mi tegbe tegbe aji [0.68]
 person but RM do DEM_N LOC 1SG alwaysalways QI
 ‘but who kept on to do this to me again and again?’ [AC 2: 68]

The example shows the routine marker, which is emphasized by the duplication of the Fongbe **tegbe** ‘again and again’.

The recurrence markers

Performers often use the markers **le** ‘reiterative’ and **vo** ‘repeat’ to highlight recurrent actions in successive paragraphs that repeat the violation of a taboo. The mother cat in one of the ‘Cat and leopard’-stories is convinced that her children must not eat their cousins. She refuses to serve the meat of the leopard’s cubs, but serves her children the **wǒ** porridge. She reheats the meat, and returns it to her stepsister the leopard. The following example shows her anger:

bó lé sǎ lan ǎ sǎ nyi jǐ tǎn [1.97]
 CJss RCM take meat DEF take throw LOGGEN
 ‘and she threw once more the meat on top of her **wǒ** porridge’ [AC 16:138]

Performers also use the recurrence markers both, as the following example from ‘The sadist co-wife’ shows:

bó lé klǎ zèn ǎ [0.61]
 CJss RCM wash pot DEF
 ‘and she thoroughly washed the pot’

bó lé vǎ ɖa nùsúnnú ɖěvo [0.39]
 CJss RCM RCM prepare sauce other
 ‘and once more she cooked a fresh sauce’

⁹⁰ I will discuss the use of the irrealis marker **na** and the reported irrealis marker **kó** in the section on mood, pp. 173f.

bó lé qù [1.87]

CJss RCM eat

‘and once more she ate it’ [AC 2: 51 -53]

The out-of-sequence marker

Performers use the out-of-sequence marker **ko** to rearrange the chain of events by exchanging two events of the plot of the story.⁹¹ The way the performer conveys the story’s trajectory ‘plot’ differs from the ‘history’ of the story. The performer tells a chain of events that shows ‘ACBD’ instead of ‘ABCD’ (Givón 2001. I: 295).⁹²

Let us consider a passage from the Abomey-Calavi version of the ‘Cat and leopard’ stories, which is the longest one of the three editions (AC 16). The passage is a change of scene and chronology, and anticipates what the leopard will see, when she arrives at the cat’s house. The performer starts this story with a scoop, an exclusive news story that reports the wicked hiding in ambush of the powerful leopard who fails to murder the wise cat, her stepsister. In spite of this, she suggests to kill all the children since the price of maize went up. The cat reluctantly agrees. After the leopard killed four of her five children, the cat still has five children, for she serves her children the cub-meat, and returns the leftovers to the leopard.

The example begins with the leopard that wonders about the odd taste of the meat that the cat sent. She decides to visit the cat. The example shows the instantaneous switch of decor, from the house of the leopard over to the house of the cat. The performer reports what happened there earlier that morning, before the leopard planned to visit the cat.

é wá⁹³ [0.80]

CL₃ come.to

‘the leopard eventually said to herself, what is going on’

⁹¹ The tone of this marker is mid, though its position in the clause often entails a high tone.

⁹² **ko** is also used to convey an accomplished action in combination with the non-perfective marker (see p. 180).

⁹³ The performer meant to say: **é wá q̣ àn** (Désiré Vigan 1976, personal communication).

ḍé lan é ḍù émí ḍé ́ ḍò kpíkácá émí wè
 CP meat REL eat LOG AUX TOP_{CL} AUX suspect LOG pFOC
 ‘that the meat that she was eating, that she had her doubts’ [0.12]

émí ná ḍisa nyi kpón nafi émi kò le [1.20]
 LOG RIM walk throw check aunt LOG neck turn
 ‘that she would see what her stepsister was up to’

àn awíí kó fón zǎn-zǎn [0.24]
 MDM cat OSM wake-up morning-morning
 ‘God forbid! the cat had already woken up early’

bo kò dun sìn bo lè wù nú vǐ tòn atóón lé bí [0.72]
 CJss OSM draw water CJss bath body LOCchild GEN five PL QF
 ‘and had already drawn water and bathed all her five children’

‘The leopard eventually said to herself what is going on! That the meat she was eating had a strange taste. She said that she would see what her stepsister was up to. God forbid! The cat had already woken up early, and she had already drawn water from the well to bath all her five children.’ [AC 16: 154-158]

The first three utterances of the example take place in the leopard’s place. The fourth and fifth utterances of this example show the out-of-sequence markers **kó** and **kò**. The fourth utterance begins with the meta-discourse marker that expresses disapproval (see p. 192). The story takes a dramatic turn after this passage.

In storytelling, the marker **kò** is often translated into ‘already plus a pluperfect tense’ (Désiré Vigan 1976, personal communication). The marker occurs 59 times in the corpus. It is translated into the pluperfect tense in only three cases (AC 3, AC 4: 198, A 4: 77). In one case, it occurs in a negative clause with the negation {**kun...ó**} meaning ‘had not yet gone’ (AC 4: 218).

On the other hand, Lefebvre mentions that the interpretation of a sentence containing **kò** is ambiguous.⁹⁴ Hence, Lefebvre suggests that **kò** has two functions. It is either the marker of anteriority the ‘pluperfect tense’ or the equivalent of the adverb ‘already’. There can be two occurrences of **kò** within the same clause (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 89ff., 375ff.). The corpus does not show these two occurrences of the marker in the same clause. Therefore, I cannot verify whether the marker has two functions indeed.

⁹⁴ The performers of the corpus said **ko** or **kó**. It is puzzling why Lefebvre permanently notes **kò**.

Mood

Mood expresses the attitude of the speaker about what happens next in the story. Generally, the performers use three intentional markers in the story. The marker **ná** conveys intentional information about an event that may happen, but is, on the contrary, not realised. The marker expresses an irrealis.

The combination {**na + ko**} is a reported irrealis marker that conveys what might have happened if the central participant had not acted. The markers **ní** and **ma** convey an optative. They convey intentional information about an action that the speaker strongly desires or about a condition to make an action happen. Mood in the performance of storytelling reflects the attitude and opinions of the central participant.⁹⁵

The irrealis marker **ná**

Let us consider the mood marker **ná**. Performers use this marker also in storytelling. The marker **ná** is used to indicate the action as a potential happening: the mood of irrealis. The marker **ná** reflects the speaker's attitude towards a potential incident in the story. The central participant mentions that an action or event may happen in the future, or, when it is used in a conditional clause, that it might happen. The underlying style figure is omission. What happens next is that the central participant warns off doing something. The effect is rhetorical, for the suspense increases.

The next example is from one of the versions of 'The day to thresh the millet' (A 4). The example is a fragment that conveys the expectations of the central participant in reported speech. It shows a conditional clause in the second utterance that starts a new paragraph. The first utterance of the example is the last utterance of a paragraph. The example shows the verb 'say' and indirect speech in combination with the mood marker **ná** to indicate that he better should not marry her, for his wives would make fun of her (which did not happen):

b'é dḡ jī blǎ dḡ wù émitòn [1,97]
 CJds.CL₃ say CP defect be body LOG.GEN
 'and she said that her body was not perfect'

lé é dà émi ɔ́
 CP 3SG marry LOG TOP_{CL}
 'that if he married her'

⁹⁵ The performers convey commands and inhibitions by using a negative verb phrase construction. This construction only occurs in songs (see pp. 200 f).

ø tɔn lé na zun ɖɔ nú émi
 ø GEN PL IRR insult say LOC LOG
 ‘his ones would insult her’

‘And she said that her body was not perfect. If he married her, his wives would insult her.’ (A 4: 14-16)

The story learns that ‘his ones’ meaning the other wives of the household will not insult the new wife, for only the eldest wife insults her. The other co-wives and sisters-in-law fall silent at the slandering of the first co-wife (A 4: 71-79).

The reported irrealis marker (RIM)

The combination of {ná + **ko** + **VP**} shows the mood that an action might have happened. This occurs sometimes in the ‘breaking news’ sequence after the denouement, as shows the following example, taken from the Abomey-Calavi version of ‘Cat and leopard’-story. The central participant, that is the youngest cat, reports his courageous action to his mother who arrived after the almost fatal attack from the leopard. Note the grammatical rapport between the clauses, which is beyond the bounds of the utterances:

o kɔ ná kó [0.38]
 oh leopard RIM
 ‘oh the leopard would have’

hù mɛ bĩ bó ko nù hun bĩ sín lan mɛ [0.29]
 kill person QF CJss RIM drink blood QF GEN meat LOC
 ‘killed everybody and would have sucked out all the blood from the meat’

‘Oh! The leopard would have killed all his brothers, and she would have sucked out all the blood from their corpses’ [AC 16: 338, 339]⁹⁶

⁹⁶ The short pauses indicate the staccato of the utterances (see ‘denouement’ p. 159). The tone of the verbal mood marker is dependent on the tone of the preceding element; the marker always shares the tone of the preceding pronoun subject, with the exception of the plural **mĩ**, ‘we’, and **yě**, ‘they’. In both cases, the tone is adapted: **mĩ kó** and **yě kó**.

The optative markers *nĩ* and *ma*

The verbal mood markers *nĩ* and *ma* require an action, for example a wish or a command. These optative markers have the nuances of either ‘please’ or ‘must’.

kpə wá ɖɔ nú awii ɖə nĩ [0.67]
 leopard come say LOC cat CP LOC.CL₃
 ‘the leopard said to the cat, saying to her’

lee nĩ e ka só vĩ-me-tən ɖokpó ɖokpó
 CP OPT CL₃ but take child-person-GEN one one

bo hu ɔ
 CJss kill TOP_{CL} [0.70]
 ‘that well, that one should take one’s children one by the other and kill it’

e ma ná dó nɔ ɖà wɔ vɔvɔ ná aji
 3SG OPT IRM put RM prepare porridge red LOC IQ

amiwɔ ná aji [1.36]
 red.porridge LOC IQ
 ‘one must cook red **wɔ** porridge at least with it, a red **wɔ** with it’ [laughter]

‘The leopard said to the cat, saying, that, well, that they must take their children, one after the other, and kill them; that they must cook a red **wɔ** porridge with it, a red **wɔ** porridge with it’ [AC 16: 55-57]⁹⁷

13.2. The non-perfective marker

The non-perfective marker refers to the topic of the story and the actions that depict the topic. The topic is the heart of the story. The non-perfective marker conveys qualitative information about the general conduct of the agents. The marker presents the topic to the audience as new information, for, pragmatically speaking, the topic refers to the content of the story that the performer will tell. This marker is used as a figure of speech that transforms the issue of the story to a fact of the past that continues in the present. Each reference to the topic throughout the story shows the use of this marker.

The start of the story conveys the topic of the story as an action that started in the past, even before the performer starts to perform the story: ‘My story took off to fly,

⁹⁷ Red porridge = ‘cornmeal and palm oil; Note the pun: **vɔvɔ** means ‘at least’; **vɔvɔ** means ‘red’, ‘scarlet’.

fast hovering around like a bird, and it landed upon the agents A and B. They fought'. However, the performer literally says 'They were fighting'. The topic of the story points to the existing status quo, which consists of the long-term motive of the continuous struggle or adversity between the pair of agents. The topic expresses an ongoing process that has the property of the progressive form.⁹⁸

The non-perfective marker has the following structure:

{**ye** + **dò** + **VP** + **wè**}
 {3 PL + AUX + VP + pFOC}

The formula shows the following aspects: the non-perfective marker focuses on the verbal phrase of the clause. The construction consists of two elements: the auxiliary verb **dò** 'to be' and the predicate focus marker **wè** 'it is'. The auxiliary verb precedes the verb phrase and the focus marker is at the end of the clause. Lefebvre mentions that the imperfective marker "is expressed by a periphrastic expression". However, the glosses differ from the glosses that I use (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 95ff.).

The following fragment is from the Abomey-Calavi edition of 'The sadist co-wife'. The example shows that the performer uses the non-perfective marker to convey the topic and then tells the consequences by adding the routine marker **nó**:

('My story took off to fly, fast hovering around like a bird, and it landed on two co-wives')

bò yě dò wù-hwán wè [1.08]
 CJds 3PL AUX body-spoil pFOC
 'and they were jealous'⁹⁹

ayĩ dè hón ó [0.22]
 earth INDF open TOP_{CL}
 'any day that rose'

hun-xo wè jén yè nó dè [0.89]
 blood-fight pFOC precisely 3PL RM AUX
 'they always fought, that is what they did'

⁹⁸ The properties of the Fongbe progressive form are synonymous to the properties that describe the English language (Givón 2001, I: 289).

⁹⁹ **hwan** 'to spoil' is also used when speaking of food: **nusunnu hwan**, 'the fermented sauce'.

bó nǎ [0.39]
 CJss RM
 ‘and they always’

ḍò jle-ḍə wè bó nǎ ḍò hun-xo wè
AUX quarrel-say pFOC CJss RM AUX blood-fight pFOC
kákákákákákáká [1.01]
 long.time
 ‘argued and fought for a long time’

hun-xo wε jén yè nǎ ḍè [0.89]
 blood-fight pFOC precisely 3PL RM AUX
 ‘they fought continuously, that is what they always did’

‘And they were jealous; any day that rose, they always fought, that is what they did; and they always argued and fought for a long time; they fought continuously, that is what they always did.’ [AC 2: 3-7]

The example shows that the grammatical structure of the non-perfective marker is characterized by permutation.

Performers often refer to the topic by stressing the continuum of time and space, like for example in the following frequently uttered clause:

yě ḍò yiwi wε káká ǎ
 3PL AUX go pFOC SPM TOP_{CL}
 ‘when they kept on going for a long time’ (AC 13: 17)

The example indicates an infinitely long journey that takes a lot of time.

The next example from ‘The sadist co-wife’ shows the occurrence of the non-perfective marker at the start of the denouement. The young co-wife put magical glue around the rim of the saucepot, which is the central participant. After the eldest co-wife relieved herself in the saucepot, she is stuck to the glued rim. She tried to free herself, she wanted to break it, but that was impossible:

é yí zé kpò
 CL₃ get take stick
 ‘she took a stick’

bó [0.26]
 CJss
 ‘and she’

gbá dó [0.27]

break LOC

‘smashed against’

nùsúnnú-zén **ś** **wu** **b̀** **nùsúnnú-zén** **ś** **ná** **m̀**
sauce-GEN.pot DEF GEN-body CJds sauce-GEN.pot DEF IRM find

ten **d̀** **gbá** **jén** **wɛ** [0.13]

place AUX break precisely pFOC

‘the saucepot’s body and the saucepot should really break in pieces’

é **gló** [0.17]

CL₃ be.impossible

‘it did not happen’

é **gbà** **ǎ** [0.49]

CL₃ break NEG

‘he did not break’

‘She took a stick, and she smashed it against the saucepot. It should have broken the saucepot into pieces, but nothing happened. The saucepot did not break.’ (AC 2: 145-150)

The non-perfective marker is also used at the denouement. The last example from ‘The sadist co-wife’ shows the utterances that convey the reactions of the audience, right after the song of the central participant:

[audience:]

nusunnu **gbá** **d̀** **xa** **d̀** **ná** **mi** **[ø]** [0]

sauce break AUX secret put LOC 1PL [ø (pFOC)]

‘the sauce revealed the secret to us’

[performer:]

nùsúnnú-zén **’ne** **d̀** **han** **d̀** [0.29]

sauce-GEN.pot DEM_R AUX sing put

‘that saucepot sung clinging to’

[performer together with the audience:]

o **yonu** **wɛ** **’né** [1.26]

IJ thigh pFOC DEM_R

‘wow! to those thighs’ [AC 2: 167 – 169]

In this example, the non-perfective marker is used twice to reveal the denouement. A close look at the example shows that the performer omitted the predicate focus marker **wɛ** in the first utterance of this example. This often happens in storytelling.

The non-perfective marker is part of the narrative perfective past, and transforms into a perfective past at the denouement. The grammatical construction of the non-perfective marker captures the aspect of an ongoing action, called ‘la forme progressive’ (Guillet 1973 a: 10ff.). Lefebvre described the aspect: “The imperfective aspect describes a situation that has already begun, but that has not been completed at the time of the moment of speech, or at the time of a reference point” (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 95ff.). The description by Lefebvre provides us with the imperfective aspect, the continuity in the present, and the new information, for example, in ‘he is eating’.

Grammatical permutation within the paragraph

The non-perfective marker occurs in a number of successive clauses that show grammatical permutation and semantic recurrence. The non-perfective marker has the following structure:

{**ye** + **qò** + **VP** + **wɛ**}
 {3 PL + AUX + VP + pFOC}

The formula shows that the non-perfective marker focuses on the verbal phrase of the clause, and consists of the auxiliary verb **qò** ‘to be’ and the predicate focus marker **wɛ** ‘it is’ (see p. 179). The recurrent form of the non-perfective marker involves permutation: the word order is inversed, and leads to nominalization involving permutation. The permutation transforms the usual Fongbe clause order from SV into VS, as is shown in the following example:

{**VP** + **wɛ** + **yě** + **qɛ**}
 {VP + pFOC + 3PL + AUX}

The subject in both constructions is the personal pronoun **yě** ‘they’, meaning the pair of agents.

The permutation of the recurrent form of the non-perfective marker may add the habitual aspect.¹⁰⁰ In Fongbe, the non-perfective marker conveys the aspect of routine through the particle **nɔ** (see for example p.170, and Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 86, 95). The cited sequence shows the permuted form of the non-perfective marker in the second repetition:

¹⁰⁰ The impact of the habitual aspect is described for the English language (Givón 2001, II: 246-250).

{VP + wɛ + ye + nɔ́ + ɖɛ}

The fragment demonstrates that the focus marker highlights the imminent crisis, which is conveyed by the nominalized verb phrase. The topic becomes a statement due to the recurrence in the successive clauses of this paragraph.¹⁰¹

Other verbal markers also accompany the non-perfective marker. Performers in Abomey sometimes add the verbal aspect marker **ko** to start the story, that is the naming of the agents and the topic. It is used in combination with the emphasized form of the non-perfective marker, as the following example shows:

{wɛ + ko + ɖɛ + NP}

The Fongbe marker **ko** is used to indicate the aspect of an accomplished action. It has the meaning of ‘already’ when used together with the non-perfective marker.¹⁰² The following fragment shows the start of the Abomey version of ‘The sadist co-wife’ (A 5). The storyteller begins the story with the statement that the husband already had a first wife, but married a second one, as the following example shows:

∅ wɛ ko ɖ'-àsú tɔn'sí [1.19]
 ∅[=3SG] pFOC already be-husband GEN-LOC
 ‘actually, she was already her husband’s wife’

bɔ **àsú** **tɔn** **ká** **yí** **dà** **ɖěvo** [0.84]
 CJds husband GEN but get marry another
 ‘and now her husband got married to another woman’ [AC 5: 1,2]

The example enables us to observe that the performer has the choice of combining different grammatical aspects. The style element in this example is the omission of the subject at the beginning of the performance. The start of the story is elliptical, and it gives relevant information. The performer starts the story with mentioning that the first wife was non-existent. Therefore, she uses a verb phrase that focuses an ‘empty’ subject. The example shows that the performer emphasizes the meaning of ‘already’, and adds dramatically that the first wife’s marriage was over, which the audience understands right from the beginning.

13.3. The serial verb construction of the peak

Performers exclusively use a serial verb construction (SVC) to convey the peak, and all the successive references to the peak throughout the story. The SVC consists of

¹⁰¹ The non-perfective marker probably has also a mnemonic function for the performer and the audience.

¹⁰² Here the translation of the aspectual **ko** into ‘already plus a pluperfect tense’ is suspended.

distinct verbs that each conveys a part of the action within the utterance. The following example shows the peak of Abomey-Calavi 2:

bó nyè mĩ kón dó nùsúnnú ́ mè [2.54]
 CJss relieve excrement pour apply sauce DEF LOC
 ‘and she relieved herself in this very sauce’ [laughter]

bó nyè mĩ kón dó nùsúnnú-zén ’né ́ mè
 CJss relieve excrement pour apply sauce-GEN.pot DEM_R DEF LOC
 ‘and she relieved herself in that saucepot of hers’ [0.44]

bó lé sú dó [0.69]
 CJss RCM close put
 ‘and she put the cover back again’

‘and the first co-wife relieved herself in this very sauce, and she relieved herself in that saucepot of the second co-wife, and she put the cover back again’ [AC 2: 35-37]

The example shows that the performer repeats the clause that conveys the peak, in reaction to the laughter of the audience.

The first time that the second co-wife discovers the spoiled sauce, she cries out the following utterance:

[Ø] éló ká lé gó-sín bó wá jè [0.30]
 [Ø] DEM_N but repeat come-GEN CJss come.to fall
 ‘but what dirt did get again’

nùsúnnú-zén mé nú mĩ
 sauce-GEN.pot GEN.LOC LOC 1SG_O
 ‘in the saucepot in front of me’ [AC 2: 46, 47]

The young woman threw away the spoiled sauce:

é zé nùsúnnú ́ bó yí sọ kón nyì gbě [0.74]
 CL₃ lift sauce DEF CJss get lift pour throw LOC
 ‘she lifted the sauce and she tossed it out’ [AC 2: 50]

The performers stop the practice of using SVC’s to refer to the peak at the denouement.

13.4. Discussion of and conclusions on the grammatical choices

In this chapter, I discussed the grammatical choices that the performers made. These choices often regard the function of the verb. Style in **hwènùxó** makes obvious that

specific parts of the story have a fixed grammatical form, like for example the use of the non-perfective marker to convey the topic.

The stories in the corpus show a number of verbal markers. Verbal markers that indicate aspect or mood prefix to the bare verb. The meaning of the majority of aspect markers in Fongbe unmistakably gets close to the meaning of tense. The performers use four aspect markers to convey the nature of an action. The routine marker conveys frequency, the two recurrence markers convey recurrence and the out-of-sequence marker conveys a change in the chain of events.

Mood conveys the attitude of the central participant about what happens next in the story. The mood markers allow the central participant to say what might happen or what could have happened, or what would be a desirable outcome. He has the freedom to comment on the agents or to warn them against a lesser fortune. In general, the performers use three intentional markers in storytelling.

The irrealis marker indicates the attitude of the central participant towards a potential happening in the story. The reported irrealis marker signals that an action might have happened. The two optative markers convey a wish or command.

The non-perfective marker is used to convey the topic of the stories. The non-perfective marker refers to a non-perfective aspect in the past that is continuing during the performance, and ends with the denouement.

Finally, I discussed the specific serial verb constructions and their use in the peak.

14. Style in the use of words

Performers carefully choose their words to colour the performance. One of the main features to colour the performance is the manifold application of the deictic function. I will describe the qualifications that the performers give to the central participant. Agents have no qualifications; the performers confine to name each agent, or they even omit one of them. I will consider the array of deictic markers that occur. Performers use connectivity to create suspense, and they use meta-discourse markers to comment on the actions of the agents. Finally, I will discuss the ideophones that the performers coin.

14.1. Qualifications of the central participant

The central participant is the protagonist who is the star actor of the plot. He is the only character of the story, for he is a sentient being in dramatic stories, and a calculating being in comic stories.¹⁰³ The central participant has divine and supernatural properties. Let us recall that he is either a personal object, a deity who transforms into a human being, or the trickster in comic stories.

At his first appearance in the story, the central participant is indicated with the definite marker *ɔ́*, which is placed after the noun. The definite marker tracks his whereabouts in the story and so becomes a pragmatic deictic marker that spots him throughout the story. When he meets with misfortune, the performer omits the marker, which is the style figure of omission. The omission refers to the behaviour of the gods who temporarily change shelters in the case of misfortune. The definite marker tracks the central participant, but also his aliases and paraphernalia.

Let us consider two examples of the tracking of the central participant, for example the saucepot in ‘The sadist co-wife’. The first example shows a flash forward by the audience that uses no definite particle. On the contrary, the performer uses the definite particle when she tells that the second wife looks in vain for her saucepot, shown in the second example:

nùsúnnú-zén	ví	cè	jǒèèè-jǒèèè	[3.25]
sauce-GEN.pot	child	POS ₁	IP	
‘My dear little saucepot, frizzle sizzle’				[AC 2: 129]

¹⁰³ This is the relevant difference between the central participant and the agents of the corpus. Agents have neither feelings nor thoughts; they incorporate the good and the bad side of a coin. They are named after their function (see 5.2. and 5.3.).

nùsúnnú-zén **ví** **cé** **ḍ**
 sauce-GEN.pot child POS₁ DEF

‘My dear little saucepot, that’s the one’ [AC 2: 160]

Notice that the second example shows the crying out by Agent A, who uses the definite marker to indicate that she cannot find the saucepot in which she cooks and stores her delicious sauce. Both examples show the use of the cherishing **ví** ‘child’. The example exhibits the accumulation of a possessive pronoun and the definite marker.

Epithets and Epitomes

The performers sometimes use epithets and epitomes to personalize the central participant. Fongbe has only a small number of adjectives that convey a quality. Therefore, performers of comic stories coin epitomes that suit the trickster **Yḍgbó**. The trickster is by far out a unique central participant who has specific epithets that add to the comic character of the stories. Nevertheless, the performer of one of the ‘Cat and leopard’-stories invented the names of the youngest kitten and the youngest leopard cub (AC 16; see p. 186).

There is a difference between epithets and epitomes. The epithet has a social or economic function. An epithet can occur at any place in the story. An epitome is a surname that explains what happens, and that has a fixed relation to the story (Van Engelenhoven 2009, personal communication).

The trickster **yè** has for example the following epithets:

dàwé **dé** **ka** **nyí** **adɔ-nɔ** **yɛ**
 man INDF but name web-GEN.mother Yè

bò **e** **nɔ** **yí** **ɛ** **dḍ** **yɔ.gbó**
 CJds CL₃ RM call 3SG say Yò.big

‘Now a man had the name Fat Big Yè ‘the Web’s Owner’, and they always called him Big Yò’ (Ay 2)

The epithet **adɔnɔ** literally means ‘the web’s owner’; it means that **yɛ** is the owner of a web. The qualifying ‘big’ indicates the big mouth of the boasting trickster who is a small being (see 7.3.). The stories show various forms, such as **adɔnɔ yɛgbó** ‘Gluttonous big Yè’ (Ay 2). This is synonymous to **adɔnɔ yɔgbó** ‘Gluttonous big Yò’ or **yí ḍ** ‘that well-known Yò’. The reference to the web means that **adɔnɔ yɛgbó** is a spider. This brings to mind that the Fon people do not say aloud the name of a person (see p. 76). The native Fongbe speakers always translate the epithet

adɔnɔ into ‘gluttonous’. This translation also occurs in the dictionaries that mention that the word is synonymous to **adɔtɔnɔ** (Segurolo 1968: 9; Segurolo and Rassinoux 2000: 9). Both authors assume that the first component is **adɔ** ‘intestines’. In my view, the first component is **adɔ** ‘spider’s web’ for reasons of tonality and use. The diphthong may disappear in composed words; on the other hand, a low tone often persists. Furthermore, the word occurs in one of the stories of the corpus. Here it has a mid and a high tone (Ay 3). The hyena is one of the agents in the trickster story about the Orphan and the Market of the Ancestors. He is said to be **adɔtɔnɔ wɛ** ‘he is a greedy one’. This qualifies the character of the hyena that has the role of the evil agent. Actually, he has nothing in common with the trickster.

Cece Klikpo was very skilled in coining a number of epitomes during his performance of one of the trickster stories in Ayou (Ay 4). He made the audience cheer at the epitomes that he created. The following epitomes appear in different fragments of the story:

adɔ-nɔ **yɛ-gbó** **ádi-glo-jo** **ɔ**
 web-GEN.mother yè-big large-bag.made.of.skin-fat DEF
 ‘Owner of the spider’s web, Big Yè, that one with the baggy fat tummy’

yɛ-ɖaxo **’né** **ɔ**
 Yè-big DEM_R DEF
 ‘there you are! that famous Mr Big’

adikwe-’su
 wooden.flute-GEN.man
 ‘the player of the wooden Fon whistle’

tila **adikwé-ɖɔ-’su**
 amulet GEN.wooden.flute-say-GEN.man
 ‘the whistle player of secrets’

All the references point to a lazy spider in his web, that effortlessly picks up his food, and sees all the secrets around him, because he is small and lives in dark corners. It is highly probable that the Fon trickster is the double of the Twi trickster **Ananse** from Ghana.

Let us consider the epitomes that **Falilatu Adekadjou**, the performer of one of the dramatic versions of the ‘Cat and leopard’ story coined. One of the agents, the leopard, kills her youngest child. The cub, whose fate is tragic, gets the following name:

aji sɔ nyɔ́

birth equal be.good

‘Child of noble blood’ [AC 16: 178]

The central participant of this story is the youngest kitten. The performer calls him the smartest one of the family, and he gets the following name:

aji sɔ ɛn’ nyɔ́

birth/game know four be.good

‘Master of the Four Grains’ which is one of the forms of the West African game **àjì** ‘Adjì’ [AC 16: 211, 277].

The trickster **Yɔ̀gbó** communicates to his stepbrother by playing a talking whistle by which he conveys the so-called ‘whistled language’ that no one can overhear. The following example is from Ayou 2:

a ma sè akwɛ ce gbe à

CL₂ NEG understand flute/money POS₁ GEN.language QM

‘you hear what my whistle says, don’t you?’

a ka vé sè akwɛ ce gbe à

CL₂ but ILW understand flute/money POS₁ GEN.language QM

‘now please, you hear my whistle’s speech, don’t you?’

The performer uses the word **akwɛ** ‘money’ instead of **adikwɛ** ‘wooden flute’. This happens more often. The pun is obvious in this story, for the trickster wants that his stepbrother wins the contest and it’s reward: the world (see also pp. 95, 104).

Finally, one of the performers mentions that the agents have a native language; the cat speaks the Cat’s language, and the leopard speaks the Leopard’s language that is the royal language:

awũ-sín-gbe ɔ́

cat-GEN-language DEF

‘the Cat’s language’ [AC 16: 287]

kpa-sín-gbè

leopard-GEN-language

‘the Leopard’s language’ [AC 16: 288]

na.gán-sín-gbe ɔ́

mother.chief-GEN-language DEF

‘the language of the royal aunt’ [AC 16: 300]

These last examples are epitomes that signal that the leopard tries to deceive the cat's sons by speaking Cat's language. The odds are in her favour, but the youngest cat is smart and puzzles over who is speaking and what she has in mind.

14.2. The use of deictic markers

Performers use deictic markers as one of the main features to enhance their speech. Deictic markers emphasize the crucial events of the story and support the thread of discourse. The performer points out the chronological order of the story for example, by the adjunct **din** 'now'. The deictic function highlights the star character of the central participant by adding the definite marker **ɔ́**.

The use of these markers in storytelling is more elaborate than textbooks and grammars suggested in the past. The performance exploits the possibilities in language usage in full. Performers use a broad range of deictic markers to indicate the dimension of the virtual distance between the audience and the agents. Markers point at a location that is either proximate to the performer, or more remote from the performer. Deictic markers are always placed after a noun or an adjunct.

Two particles function as a deictic marker: the focus marker **wè** 'it is' or 'there you are', and the presentative marker **djè** 'here you are!'. The marker **djè** is replaced by the abbreviation **è** at the end of an utterance (see A 4: 137, 138). I glossed the focus particle as {**aFOC**}, 'a' for argument, to distinguish it from the {**pFOC**}, 'p' for predicate that occurs in the non-perfective marker. The argument focus particle is used for example in ideophones. The presentative marker points at an agent or an event.

été ka djè nya [0.31]

what but PM IJ

'Look at this! Now what is going on, huh?' (AC 2: 49)

The use of demonstrative pronouns is more eye-catching in storytelling than in daily speech, for performers make pointing gestures when they use them. Fongbe has two demonstrative pronouns: **éɔ́**, meaning 'this here, near to the performer' {**DEM_N**}, and **éne** 'that there, remote from the performer' {**DEM_R**}.

bó sú hɔ̀n bó lɛ djido axi [0.71]

CJss close door CJss repeat set.forth market

'and she shut the door and she went to the market again'

axi-'né é yi bó wá é ɔ́ [0.87]

market-DEM_R CL₃ go CJss come RES TOP_{CL}

'when she returned from that market'

or: * 'she returned from that market in question' [AC 2: 56, 57]

The last translation is improbable, for the two utterances form a tail-head construction (see 10.1.).

The accumulation of several deictic markers is usual in storytelling. The markers occur in a range of various combinations of which deictic focus particles, deictic markers and demonstrative pronouns are part. Performers combine possessive adjectives with the definite marker.¹⁰⁴ The following example shows this combination that indicates the central participant:

nùsúnnú-zén cè ǎ un ma ka mǎ 'né [0.62]
 sauce-GEN.pot POS₁ DEF CL₁ NEG but find DEM_R
 ‘but I cannot find my own saucepot’ [AC 2: 61]

Performers in Ayou often use this combination to point out the trickster:

yègbo towé-vǎ
 big Yo POS₂-DEF
 ‘your trickster there’

Performers also place the definite marker after a demonstrative pronoun to increase the impact:

nùsúnnú 'né ǎ [0.23]
 sauce DEM_R DEF
 ‘there you are! That sauce!’

Kinetics plays a crucial role in storytelling. Performers are continuously pointing at an agent and a specific action of the story. Performers use the combinations of deictic markers to emphasize the gestures they make.¹⁰⁵

Performers use adjuncts to mark the chronology of the story, or to indicate the switching from the order of time and setting. Adjuncts indicate the nature of successive events or actions: **din** and **din ǎ** ‘now’, as well as **trolo** ‘immediately’. These adjuncts refer to the events of the story, to the moment that they take place in the story, not to the ‘real time’. Konrad affirmed this use (Konrad 1994: 110ff.). Sometimes the particle **ǎ** is added to the adjunct, though often there is no pause. The performer emphasizes the adjunct by adding the particle that conveys an important action is on the verge of happening. The particle functions as a discourse marker in these cases, meaning ‘you know’, ‘well’ and so forth.

¹⁰⁴ Fongbe has two possessive adjectives: **cè** ‘my’ and **towè** ‘your’. Possession in the 3SG personal pronoun is conveyed by the genitive case marker **étǎn** or **tǎn** ‘his’ or ‘her’ (see Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 67f).

¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, I have no pictures of the kinetics, for performers did not allow me to make pictures or films during the recordings.

This usage of adjuncts is similar to the use of the following chronological indications like ‘one day’, ‘the next day’, or **zǎnzǎn sɔ̀** ‘the next morning’, or **gbadanu sɔ̀** ‘the next evening’ that indicate that the story advances. In general, the indications of time in the stories move the story forward by indicating the successive actions that occur one after another. Performers sometimes use poetic expressions as an extra: **éé ayí hɔ̀n ɔ̀** literally meaning ‘when the earth opened’, that is ‘when the day rose’, and so on. These expressions give notice to the audience that ‘at this point of the story’ a crucial action happens. The usage of the Fongbe adjunct **sɔ̀** in narrative discourse often is limited to the meaning of ‘tomorrow’, which differs from the usage in speech where it means ‘yesterday’ as well as ‘tomorrow’ (see for example Ay 5 and AC 16). However, in one story, the performer deliberately creates confusion by using **sɔ̀** alternately as ‘tomorrow’ and ‘yesterday’ (Ay 7). This adjunct is context sensitive, for the context decides whether the word refers either to the past or to the future.

The indication of locations is vague. The stories often take place ‘in the hut’ or ‘at the market’. Kings live in a palace with a huge porch and a number of huts, kitchens and bathrooms. Ancestors live ‘in the supernatural world’ or in ‘the House of Rain’ where ‘the Market of the ancestors’ is located. Gods live in the ‘Land of Sky’ or take shelter in ‘the tree of Abomey’.

14.3. Topicalization and omission of agents

The performers sometimes topicalize the noun of an agent, but they also may occasionally omit an agent from the discourse. Topicalization emphasizes the agent in question while omission indicates that the agent has a very low position. The following example shows the utterance of the noun that conveys Agent A, and the insertion of the personal pronoun in the following utterance, which makes the noun a topic:

nỳ̀nù́ **ǎ́** [0.93]
 woman TOP_N
 ‘that woman we know’

é **só** **axi-nú** [0.62]
 CL₃ take market-GEN.thing
 ‘she prepared her goods’ [AC 2: 12, 13]

Right before the peak, the performer contemptuously refers to Agent B as the following example shows:

ǎ́ **tɔn** **ǎ́** [1.05]
 INDF GEN TOP_N
 ‘her co-wife’

é **wà** **dědě** [0.33]
 CL₃ come.to softly
 ‘she approached softly’ [AC 2: 23, 24]

The following example shows the full omission of Agent B in the opening utterance of the Abomey-version of ‘The sadist co-wife’:

ø **wε** **ko** **ǎ́`àsú** **tɔn`sí** [1.19]
 ø [=CL₃] pFOC already be-husband GEN-hands
 ‘actually she was already her husband’s wife’ [A 5: 1]

This utterance confirms a fact that the audience must know right from the beginning. Actually, before the story starts, the performer makes sure that the first wife has no position indeed.

14.4. Suspense through connectivity

The clause-final topic **ɔ** is the main discourse connective in the performance (see chapter 10). The clause introducer **ée** is used to build up suspense, when it equals an utterance. The coordination of utterances uses the conjunctions **bó** and **bɔ̀**, meaning ‘and’. These conjunctions often are the first word of the utterance, but style may transform the usual occurrence. The conjunction occurs as an utterance. On the other hand, the performers put it at the end of an utterance. The result of these usages is the increasing of suspense. Clauses that are coordinated by the conjunction **bó** convey also the referential identity of the subject of the clause. The introduction of a new subject of the clause requires the use of a dynamic verb in combination with **bɔ̀** ‘and’.

The Klikpo brothers in Ayou transform connectivity into a stylistic element. They use the conjunction **bó**, meaning ‘and’ (having an identical and referential subject as in the preceding clause), and the conjunction **bɔ̀**, meaning ‘and’ (changing the subject in the clause that follows) as a suspense marker. Either both performers put the conjunction at the end of an utterance, followed by a pause, or they deliver the conjunction as a single-worded utterance, preceded and followed by a pause. This frequently occurs when the subject changes: **bɔ̀**.

Subordination links utterances. The performers use **ka** or **kɔ** or **kɔn** to convey subordination. These words are not the first word of a clause. They are placed after the subject, but precede the verb. They indicate a contrast with the preceding clause. However, their meaning in narrative discourse is not ‘but’ as Segurola’s dictionary advices. The meaning is close to a comment as ‘well’, ‘now’, ‘you know’.

Performers often duplicate, or even quintuple the adjunct **káká** as a suspense marker. The adjunct expresses ‘very much’ or ‘very long’. The performer extends the time of speech, and so increases the intensity of what is happening. The marker always occurs in duplication to emphasize that the performers talk about a long time. The repetition of this duplication may rise to more than five times, and the storyteller’s voice gets gradually louder to increase the emphasis. There often is a pause after this marker. In the **Yɔ̀gbó** stories the suspense marker is usually prolonged for a comic effect: **kákákákákákákákáká**. Konrad confirmed this effect (Konrad 1994: 104ff.).

The adjunct **jén** that means ‘only’, ‘precisely’, ‘really’ in daily speech, is used in storytelling to indicate a specific point in the story: ‘now’, ‘there’, ‘at this point’. This adjunct is always used on its own.

14.5. Meta-discourse markers: comment and opinion

The performers use monosyllabic utterances that interrupt their speech. The meta-discourse markers **án**, **àn** and **hǔn** convey the comment and opinion of the performer. They often comment on the actions of the agents, especially on agent B. These markers are all nasal vowels. Their tone is an indication of the meaning of the comment. A high tone conveys surprise: **án** ‘Can you believe this’; a low tone expresses disapproval: **àn** ‘I say’. A diphthong that starts with a high pitch before it descends and then rises again indicates anger or indignation: **hǔn** ‘She is despicable!’¹⁰⁶

The Fongbe word **nùgbó** is an adjunct. Performers sometimes nominalize it by adding the definite particle as the following example shows:

nùgbó **ó**
truth DEF
‘That is the truth, really’

The meaning of this combination of the adjunct and the particle is similar to the clause one often hears in Italian **e vero**.

14.6. Ideophones and onomatopoeias

Fongbe performers enjoy coining ideophones to express sensations or sensory perceptions. Ideophones have a grammatical function in the clause that is comparable to a nominalized adjunct in clauses. Ideophones conform to the Fongbe language system to which they belong. The performers coin a sound that has a meaning. These sound coinings have nothing in common with the imitations of an animal sound in English, for example, ‘boo!’ or ‘heehaw’. Performers use ideophones to entertain the audience, and to help the audience to visualize the story.

Ideophones express the sensations that reflect the present state of an agent. The morphology of ideophones reflects grammaticalization. Either the performers coin them from an existing word or they coin them as a newly created word. The main features of ideophones in narrative discourse are the following: reduplication, alliteration, and assonance. Reduplication, for the ideophones consist of three or four

¹⁰⁶ The use of the meta-discourse marker in performances differs from the use of the astonishment/amazement/surprise marker as described by Lefebvre: the M-D marker is not the last morpheme of the clause. On the contrary, either it is the first morpheme of the clause, or it is an utterance itself. Secondly, the marker and the accessory tones convey distinct emotions (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 126).

repetitions of words. The figure of alliteration often occurs, in particular by the use of the phonemes **gb** and **kp**. Some of the examples that follow show assonance.

The opening formula of a story shows the frequent occurrence of the ideophone **vīin**, which expresses the movement of the story by the sound that imitates the fast hovering around of a bird. There are many examples of ideophones that show grammaticalization that often is the nominalization of a verb. I will observe a number of these ideophones. The flying sparrow hawk is a spectacle that leads to the coining of **vuwa vuwa vuwa vuwa vuwa** meaning ‘(he took off) to fly with his big wings, and he flew, smoothly climbing and hovering around’ (Ay 3). The ideophone is repeated five times; it consists of the sound **vuin** (synonymous with **vīin**) ‘fast’ and the verb **wǎ** ‘come.to’. One of the performers enjoyed coining the movements of the small rooster that is pestering the huge elephant by fluttering above his head: **vrururu** (Ay 6). This is a remarkable ideophone, for the consonant ‘r’ hardly occurs in Fongbe, people often replace it by ‘l’.¹⁰⁷ The ideophone probably stands for ‘fast and silly’; **lũ** meaning ‘to be silly’.

Performers also use the focus marker to coin words. One of the ‘Cat and leopard’-stories shows a purring cat: **mumumu wè** (AC 16:159). The sound is a coined word, for Fongbe has no verb **mu** that means ‘purr’. Ideophones may have a focus marker:

ɔ	mumumu	wè	>	ø	mumumu	wè
AUX	purr	pFOC	>	ø	purr	aFOC
‘he was purring’ > ‘the purring cat’						

The ideophone of chasing dogs starts with the interjection **o** and again uses the focus marker. The verb in the following example is the Fongbe adjunct **gbligbli** ‘at top speed’: **o gbligbli gbligbli gbligbli gbligbli gbligbli gbligbli wè**, which means ‘Rushing in at top speed, rushing in at top speed, rushing in at top speed that was what they did’ (AC 19).

Let us consider a third example that shows a lengthening of the sound, and has no focus marker. It shows how the rooster-trickster proudly boasts after he defeated the elephant: **kokoliwəkó**, which clearly reminds us of the English onomatopoeia ‘cock-a-doodle-doo’. However, this Fongbe sound consists of three verbs ‘to crow, to swell, to hoot’ meaning ‘when he was crowing, he boasted his own importance’ (Ay 6).

Performers sometimes refer to a noun and coin ideophones from that noun, such as the following two examples show. The ideophone is based upon the Fongbe noun **kpó** ‘leopard’ and materializes the state of an agent in a pseudo-cleft construction

¹⁰⁷ There is no entry for ‘r’ in the two Fon-French dictionaries that I consulted (Segurolo and Rassinoux 2000; Höftmann 2003).

that involves the grammaticalization of the noun (AC 16: 317). The example pictures the last cry of the dying leopard that is forced to fall from the tree: **kpókp'kpəkəkəlén**. This ideophone starts with the noun for leopard **kpó**, whereupon the the vowel **ó** is devoicing to **'** and replaced by the schwa, a non-existent vowel in Fongbe: **kpə**. This **kpə** is once repeated before it changes into **kə**. The ideophone ends with the nominalized verb **lén** that means 'pay the penalty'. The meaning of the ideophone is clear: the leopard pays with her life for the slaughter of her own cubs and the attempted murder of the kittens of her stepsister, the cat. This ideophone shows also that the performers use phonemes that do not exist in Fongbe.

The second example concerns a cat. Let us have a look at the following example of frightened mice. The cat, which is a friend of the orphan, sneaks around, as if he prowls for game. The mice cry out three times **awii nya 'wii nya 'wii nya**, meaning 'the cat is bad!'. The ideophone consists of the noun **awii** 'cat' and the verb **nyà** 'is hunting' (AC 6). The sound itself resembles the English onomatopoeia 'meow'. The Fongbe ideophone is an example of camouflage or mimicry of the sound of the natural foe, which is used to deceive the much bigger cat. The corpus has also an example of what the cat says. The cat makes sure that her sound is positive, whether it is true or not. She says in one of the versions of the 'Cat and leopard'-stories the following:

'wi-nya-oo

cat-hunt-NEG

'the cat is not hunting', and 'meow' [AC 16: 290]

Performers also coin ideophones that convey a sensation; they go without focus marker. One of the performers depicts the cat that wants to take back his master's magical ring as a cat that sneaks through the bush **kleklekleklè**, meaning 'he stealthily crept along' (AC 6). The mice that agree to help the cat, are rummaging in the king's possessions. The performer compares them to ghosts: **kutu kutu kutù** (AC 6). The rope that unties itself to catch the thieves makes the following sound: **gblalalà** meaning 'sweeping rhythm of the drum of the lightning god **Xevicsù**' (AC 3).¹⁰⁸ The parents who go to the palace of the king who marries their child walk **blíblíblí**, as commoners are obliged to do when meeting the king (AC 4). The verb **blí** means 'get dirty', that is 'thick with dust'. The performer said that the defeated elephant is dying in action: **foti foti foti**, meaning 'finished off to nothing', or 'the elephant swayed to and fro' (Ay 6). After the leopard killed her last cub, the youngest cat played with the cub's head: **gbogblohun**, meaning 'cut-widen-eyes', that is 'the eyes opened and closed', like a doll's eyes (A 7).

¹⁰⁸ Note that the rope is the 16th sign of **Fa** in another story. The rope is a religious device.

The following ideophones are samples of reduplication. The first one shows four repetitions that according to the performer, imitate the sound of dripping blood: **kahun kahun kahun kahun kahun**, literally meaning ‘the funeral drum that is made of a calabash’ that is ‘thud, thud like the funeral drum’ (Ay 4). The sound of the breaking of an edible and protective gris-gris resembles the dripping blood: **kahùn** ‘crack’ (AC 19). Fire is said to burn fiercely: **hèhèè hèhèè** ‘blazing and white-hot’ (AC 6). The hyena says **yĩ yĩ yĩ yĩ** when he speaks to **Yògbó**, who is called **Yiyi** in Ewe as Konrad reported (Konrad 1994).

Even simple ideophones may have a meaning. The performer who wants to convey that an agent ventures into the bush says **vóéééé**, meaning ‘out of earshot’ (AC 19). A feather of smoke at the horizon is said to be ‘hardly visible’: **tíííí** (AC 19). The two versions of ‘The sadist co-wife’ convey the smell and the sound of the sizzling herbs and spices when cooking a sauce: **jòèèè** ‘frizzle sizzle’ (AC 2 and A 5).

It is obvious that ideophones are sometimes funny. Moreover, they are meaningful. Notice that the examples clearly show the dilemma of translation. This dilemma is acknowledged by the authors who try to give a translation, and by the authors, amongst whom Konrad, who prefer not to translate (Konrad 1994: 156). The dilemma just reflects the difficulty of understanding ideophones. In general, it is more complex to understand nonsense syllables than ideophones that stem from a noun or a verb.

Performers enjoy coining words, as the following example shows: The performer of one of the ‘Cat and leopard’-stories mentions that the cat speaks **adesingbe** ‘Cat’s’ or ‘Cat-language’. The leopard speaks this language when she tries to deceive the children of the cat; however, the youngest kitten, which is the smartest one, cannot be deceived (Ay 5).

Performers prefer coining ideophones to creating onomatopoeias. Sound imitations rarely occur in the stories. One of the rare examples of onomatopoeia is the sound of the **alinglè**, the small bell of the **vodun** priests: **yoyoyoyowe** (AC 16: 248). A second example shows the dental click **tsk** in **tsknyanyi** which conveys irritation or indicates that one dismisses a person ‘Get lost!’, ‘Go to hell’ (AC 15). The dental click also has a daily use: Fon people often lift the forefinger of the right hand and move it while uttering five successive dental clicks to dismiss salespersons in the street. Performers convey the sound of guns also by onomatopoeias. A small gun sounds like **gbòò** ‘pow!’ (Ay 4). The sound of a big shotgun is **kpaàn** ‘bang’ (Ay 2). The sound made by the Doblígodo woman who falls in a brook after stealing and eating raw beans, is **dǎà** ‘splash!’.

14.7. Discussion of and conclusions on the use of words

Performers carefully choose their words when it comes to deictic markers, clause markers and clause connectives, discourse markers, and the individual coining of ideophones. The majority of the choices are the result of a form of grammaticalization. This is for example visible in the use of the deictic function in the discourse. The most salient example of the deictic function in the performance is the tracking of the central participant by the definite particle **ɔ́**. The performers use the deictic function also to highlight the agents, but the use deviates from the one of the central participant. On the one hand, Agent A sometimes is a topicalized noun; on the other hand, the figure of omission is used to indicate Agent B.

Performers use a broad range of deictic markers to depict the virtual distance between the audience and the agents. These occur either on their own or in a range of various combinations. The following markers indicate the deictic function: the deictic focus marker **wè**, the presentative deictic marker **ɔ̀jè** and the demonstrative pronouns point at a proximate **éɓ** or more remote location **éne**. Fongbe allows a number of combinations, for example, the possessive adjective goes with the definite marker, or the demonstrative pronoun accompanies the definite marker and so forth.

The connectivity of the utterances shows a variety of adjuncts. Several adjuncts have a deictic function that underlines a specific utterance of the story, while some conjunctions function as suspense markers. The formulae that indicate the time of the day function also as a discourse connective. Performers use meta-discourse markers to give a commentary on the actions of the agents. Finally, the use of words highlights the actions of the central participant by the insertion of epithets and by the coining of epitomes, ideophones and less often onomatopoeias. Performers take the opportunity to choose their words and to create a personal style.

15. Style in songs

The *hàn* ‘song’ discloses the denouement, and reveals how one of the agents violated a taboo or interdiction. The central participant sings the song to inform us about his efforts and to denounce the culprit. Performers decide whether they insert a song into the story, for the song is not obligatorily required. The corpus numbers twenty-three songs in total. Songs accompany 19 stories out of 37 of the corpus. The other stories in the corpus have no song, and only end with the denouement and the penalty of the culprit. On the other hand, two stories in the corpus have two distinct songs, and one story has three distinct songs (Ay 2, A 3 and AC 19). Performers may also add a different song to similar stories (AC 2, A 5).

The performers set the song apart from the story by melody and rhyme such as alliteration and assonance. Furthermore, the central participant uses direct speech to sing his lines, which is the opposite of the reported speech of the agents.

Language in songs differs from the narrative discourse. The statistical analysis showed that songs have relatively few pauses. Neither the pattern of pauses, nor the clause-final particle occurs in songs.¹⁰⁹ Songs contract words and eliminate vowels to mould the words into the melody of the song. Songs use the bare verb and convey the present tense. Two aspects occur: the future and the habitual aspect. The choruses of the songs in the corpus show two mood markers: an inhibition and an illusory wish marker.

The most salient feature of style in songs is the code switching in the discourse (Kossmann 2009, personal communication). The code of the songs differs from the narrative discourse. The main feature of songs is the use of formal and solemn language. The code switching shows also the use of loanwords from neighbouring languages. These words have a different code. The language consultant often told me that he was not capable of translating the songs, for songs are part of a ‘secret language’. This means that they convey religious knowledge that only initiated people understand.

Songs are often composed of stanzas that are distinct from the chorus. The Fongbe stanza consists of couplets or quatrains. The song in the story of ‘The sadist co-wife’ has four lines that is the form of a quatrain (AC 2). The song in the Abomey edition has a stanza of two lines ‘couplet’ and a chorus of two lines; the performer repeats the stanza couplets five times, adding a new first line at each repetition (A 5).

¹⁰⁹ See also the scatter diagrams of pauses in chapter 9.

15.1. Grammatical choices in songs

Style shows in the usage of formal language in songs. Let us consider the following two examples that are from the two editions of ‘The sadist co-wife’. Agent A is worried about the central participant who is missing, and calls out ‘My darling saucepot! Frizzle! Sizzle!’. He does not answer by the usual **ɛɛn**, meaning ‘yes’, but instead he courteously answers by the polite **sɔ** meaning ‘to answer with due respect’, and he uses the anaphoric pronoun **hwɪ** instead of the clitic **a** ‘you’. This is how a daughter should answer her father, and how a wife answers her husband:

sɔ un sɔ hwɪ sɔ ɖò hwan-yonu ɖé è
 answer CL₁ answer ANA₂ answer be spoil-GEN-thigh INDF DEI
 ‘I answer you with due respect, I answer with due respect from the back of that
 jealous woman, look!’ (AC 2: 162)

The second example shows the use of the anaphoric pronoun **nyé**:

o nyé nyí nyé nyí nyé nyíkɔ
 oh ANA₁ be ANA₁ be ANA₁ name
 ‘oh! It is me! It is me! I answer!’

o nyé nyíkɔ ɖò hwanlé xwi yonu è
 oh! ANA₁ name be co-wife quietly GEN-thigh DEI
 ‘oh! I answer quietly sticking to the co-wife’s back, look!’

‘Oh! It is I! It is I! I answer! Oh! I answer quietly sticking to the co-wife’s back,
 look!’ (A 5: 62, 63)

Mood: the Inhibition Marker

The central participant sometimes sings an inhibition. Inhibition uses a periphrastic construction of the inhibitive marker **ma** and the negative marker **ó**:

{**ma** + V + **ó**}
 {**INH** + V + **NEG**}
 ‘do not’

In this construction, the clause-final negative marker **ó** is always the last word of the utterance. Songs often use inhibition to underline the religious implications. The following example stems from an Abomey-Calavi story (AC 1). It shows the song and chorus of the central participant, the twittering trekking bird.

‘The hunter came home with two snails. His wife fried them and she ate them. When her husband wanted to eat something, she cut her genitals, fried them, and served

her husband. Then a small trekking bird jumped on the wall and started singing, jumping up and down. The hunter heard the bird singing, and though he understood what the bird said, he did not grasp the meaning the first time he heard the song.’
[AC 1]

ma **ɖu** **ó**
INH eat NEG
‘do not eat!’

ma **ɖu** **ó**
INH eat NEG
‘do not eat!’

ɖɔhun **ki** **jo**
similar press IP [sound of feet on the ground]
‘there is something wrong!’
‘Do not eat! Do not eat! There is something wrong!’

Mood: the Wish Marker

Songs also use the particles **lé** and **ló** to convey a wish. The following example is from ‘The day to thresh the millet’:

é **nyí** **mi** **to** **mɛ** **l’alɔ-gan** **yaya**
CL₃ say 1PL country LOC WISH-hand-GEN.iron freely

na **so** **li** **b’ɛ** **ná** **mé**
FUT thresh millet CJds.CL₃ FUT be.fine

é **nyí** **mi** **to** **mɛ**
CL₃ say 1PL country LOC

alɔ-gan **keɖé** **ná** **so** **li** **b’ɛ** **ná** **mé**
hand-GEN.iron only FUT thresh millet CJds.CL₃ FUT be.fine

é **nyí’mi-le-tɔn** **lé.alɔ-gan** **yaya** **na**
CL₃ say-LOG-self-GEN WISH.hand-GEN.iron freely FUT

só **li** **b’ɛ** **ná** **mé**
thresh millet CJds.CL₃ FUT be.fine

15.2. The words in songs

The words in songs show that performers often use words that they borrow from other languages than Fongbe. These loanwords are often the language of a **vodun** in question. This is comparable to the initiation of new **vodun**-priests who learn to speak the ‘holy’ language of their **vodun** in the convent or the ‘thicket’. They have to relearn to speak Fongbe after they quit the thicket. The Fongbe songs from the Abomey-Calavi stories show words that are originally Nagogbe, Gungbe or Abomey-Fongbe. In the songs from Ayou occur Yoruba and Maxi words. Performers frequently call the loanwords the ‘secret language’, meaning the language that is only for the initiated men and women. A number of the songs in the Abomey-Calavi stories use Gungbe words, for example **tololo** for **trólo** ‘immediately’ (AC 9), **axóluvi** instead of **axósuvi**, ‘the king’s child’ (AC 9), or **fiye yoo**, ‘hot and white burning fire’ (AC 5).¹¹¹

Alliteration and assonance

Performers lavishly use alliteration and assonance in the choruses of the songs. The effect is spellbinding, as the following example shows:

kpla-lala-ya **hɔ-ya**
 pouch-tear-old.woman sagging-old.woman
 ‘the shrinking and sagging breasts of the old mother’ (AC 19)

Let us consider the chorus of a trickster story where **Yògbó** makes a fool of the leopard. Even the termites make fun of the leopard in the chorus of their song. Notice that termites impersonate the ancestors. The termites save the leopard’s life; he is grateful to them and promises them that he will reward them with a rich feast. However, the day before they planned their party, the trickster unexpectedly arrives. He eats the food and drinks the alcohol. He leaves nothing for the termites that come a day later. They are too late, and sing a song that has the following chorus:

kɔ **se** **lélé** **kɔ** **se** **lé** **kɔ**
 sand know loud.high.voice sand know drink sand
 ‘termites know how to pitch loud and high, termites know how to drink, termites’

se **lélé**
 know loud.high.voice
 ‘know how to pitch their voice loud and high’ (Ay 7)

¹¹¹ The text of the last cited story uses the Fongbe **myò heè** ‘red fire’.

The chorus shows that the performer perceives the red-coloured sand as synonymous with the termites and their mounds. The chorus refers to the ‘drunken’ movements that an army of termites shows.

16. Conclusions on style

Style is one of the salient features of the performance, for style depicts the poetic function that conveys the orientation and the attitude of the performer towards the story. The way of speaking reflects the style in **hwènùxó**. Performers use style to visualize the storytelling by using specific markers to highlight salient passages of the story. Style involves the language usage of the performers, when they use fixed structures to tell a specific part of the story. However, style also involves individual choices, when it comes to coining ideophones as well as giving comments by the insertion of meta-discourse markers. Songs have distinctive features, such as a melody and a rhyme that set them apart from the prose narrative.

Linguistic choices include grammatical choices as well as the use of words. Performers use several markers that influence the meaning of the bare verb by placing a marker as a prefix to the verb. The meaning of the majority of aspect markers in Fongbe unmistakably gets close to the meaning of tense. The performers use four aspect markers that refer to the moment that an action takes place. The routine marker conveys frequency, two recurrence markers convey recurrence and the out-of-sequence marker conveys a rearrangement in the chain of events.

The performers use four mood markers that reflect the attitude and opinions of the central participant. The irrealis marker indicates the central participant's attitude towards an action in what comes next in the story. The reported irrealis marker conveys that an action might have happened. The two optative markers require an action, for example a wish or a command. Performers use the non-perfective verbal marker to mark the topic of all the stories of the corpus. Performers use specific serial verb constructions of three to four verbs to convey the peak.

Performers carefully choose their words. These choices often are individual choices that colour the performance. They comprise deictic markers, clause markers and clause connectives, discourse markers and, the individual coining of ideophones. The use of words is the result of a form of grammaticalization, for instance in the coining of ideophones.

The definite particle **ɔ** tracks the central participant and all his aliases and paraphernalia. This particle is the most salient example of the use of the deictic function in the performance. Furthermore, the performers have a different orientation towards the agents, for they sometimes topicalize or omit them. Topicalization emphasizes the position that the agent in question holds in that fragment of the story; while the omission underlines that the agent has a very low position in that part of the story.

Performers use a broad range of deictic markers to indicate the dimension of the virtual distance between the audience and the agents. Performers use various combinations of deictic markers, such as deictic focus particles, deictic markers or demonstrative pronouns. These markers point at a proximate or a remote location. Gestures often emphasize the deictic markers. Kinetics plays a crucial role in the pointing at the central participant, the agents and the actions.

Performers use adjuncts to mark the coordination of the discourse, or to indicate a change in time and setting. Connectivity in combination with a pause conveys suspense. Performers use meta-discourse markers to comment on the action of the agents, especially agent B. All meta-discourse markers are nasal.

Performers like to coin ideophones that materialize sensations or sensory perceptions. Sounds in Fongbe storytelling often have a meaning. The use of epithets and epitomes gives an individual touch to the central participant in trickster stories. Performers use the dental click that is a rare phoneme in Fongbe. They also use the schwa that is no part of Fongbe.

Style in songs differs from the prose narrative by code switching. The use of words in songs concerns the use of rhyme, alliteration and assonance. Songs are composed of stanzas that have the form of a couplet or a quatrain. The chorus most often consists of a couplet. Songs have two mood markers, an inhibition and an illusory wish marker. Performers use contraction and elision to mould the words into the melody of the song. Songs use formal speech, and have religious references. The use of loanwords reminds us of the practice in the **vodun** religion where new priests learn to speak a so-called 'secret language' during their initiation in the thicket. This makes clear that the central participant refers actually to the god who temporarily takes abode in the object or utensil.

Part 5: Performance, framework and storyboard

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In this last part of the book, I will describe the elements of the performance, the underlying framework and the storyboard technique. I will discuss the different elements in similar stories, and the identical elements in different stories. Next, I will describe the role that cultural and metalinguistic codes play in the narrative choices of the performer. Finally, I will describe how the performers create their performances while they benefit from the specific Fongbe roots and codes that I described in the chapters of part 2.

17. The underlying framework

The discussion in chapter 11 showed that all stories have identical rhetorical phenomena. They have a start, a peak and a denouement, as well as an end. The issue of this chapter is whether the performers systematically carry through a framework.

All stories start with the introduction of the pair of agents and continue with the presentation of the topic. A majority of 70 % of the performers introduces the pair of agents before mentioning the topic. However, in the remaining 30 % of the corpus, the performers use a plot that differs from the ‘real’ history of the story. They introduce the agents and start with telling a topical news item about the agents, before presenting the topic. The performer is whetting the audience’s appetite by telling a small extra story that anticipates the topic of the story. The digression reports an outrageous incident between the agents that recently happened. The extra story takes about 50 utterances, and actually resembles the present-day ‘scoop’ that tabloids publish when breaking news on celebrities. After the scoop and its juicy details, performers continue the storytelling with the presentation of the topic. Actually, some performers skilfully choose the scoop to build up suspense, before they tell the topic of the story.¹¹² The next step in the story is the introduction of the central participant. In some of the stories, the performer spontaneously introduces the central participant. The accomplished performers use a flashback to introduce the central participant (see 11.2.). Note that the use of the definite marker indicating the central participant, his paraphernalia and his aliases may facilitate the structuring of recognition of the audience.

When the performers tell the peak, they convey the complication or the problem that one of the agents has to deal with. After the peak, the performers report an event or an action of one of the pair of agents. They may repeat this sequence up to three times. The recurrence may add up to four successive and similar pairs of sequences.

¹¹² Calavi 16 shows a fine sample of a scoop.

The sequences on the agents do not show a literal repetition, but they convey a recurrent message.

The order of sequences in the framework is a systematic one: the duped Agent A takes the lead, and then the impostor Agent B takes his turn. Let us remind ourselves that the pair of agents embodies the polarity that marks their actions. Agents are the operators of the message that is encoded in a binary opposition of actions and counteractions (Greimas 1966: 172ff.). The sequences do not always coincide with the paragraphs of the timing of the pattern of pauses; one paragraph may consist of two sequences of actions. Hence, I prefer to use the term sequence to explain the binary framework of the plot.¹¹³ The performers rehearse the event that constitutes the peak several times. The performer is free to improvise the alternate sequences that repeat the peak. All stories show the technique that carefully arranges the structure of the sequences that follow the peak. The alternate sequences respect the principle of duality too. Note that duality is also an outstanding mnemonic device in the improvised ‘free-for-all’ part of the performance. The polarity of the properties of the agents facilitates the recall of the actions and the moving forwards of the story (Bartlett 1932). Performers have a free choice between two types of recurrence. The first type of recurrence shows a maximum of three repetitions of which the last one shows a turnaround of the action of Agent A. The second type of recurrence shows a second repetition that provides us with new information.

Performers sometimes offer new information in the sequences that follow the recurrent sequences. This new information is about the agents and leads to the denouement. These sequences show a remarkable change of tempo. The central participant runs a risk, and the performer gathers momentum to stop the course of events. The performer tightly strings several clauses in one single utterance by cutting down on the pauses (see 9.2.6.). The central participant is about to tackle agent B to force the denouement, which is the defeat of Agent B. The story ends with the penalty of Agent B. The performance of the Abomey-Calavi edition of the ‘The sadist co-wife’ (AC 2) gives a fine example of the recurrence. The framework of the comic trickster stories is identical to the one of dramatic stories. However, performers often start trickster stories with a scoop on recent behaviour of agent B, before they start to tell the story.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Recall that a new paragraph conveys the end of ‘old’ information; new information is imminent.

¹¹⁴ The performer of one of the trickster stories for example starts with the African harrier-hawk that describes the House of Rain in the Country of Sky where all the houses are built of white beans’ puree, and where teenagers play a ballgame with edible peppery fritters (Ay 3).

This practice makes clear that it is up to the performers to show off their personal skills and style to keep the audience hooked.

The following figure shows the rudimentary framework of the hwènùxó, and the ‘free-for-all’ part of the performance that is up to the performer to choose:¹¹⁵

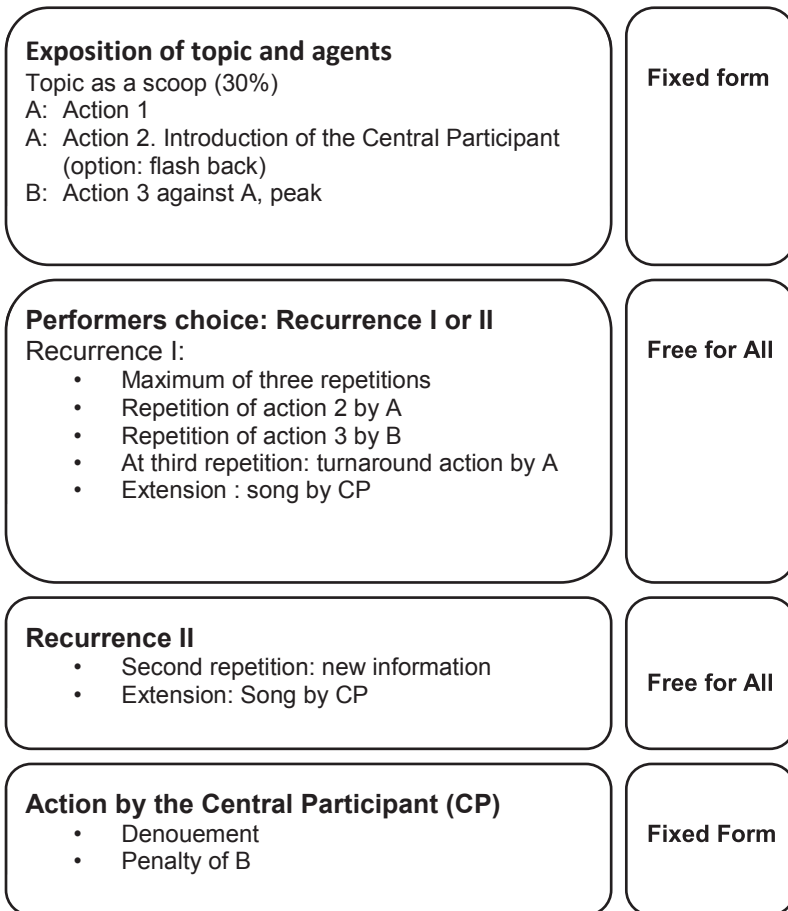


Figure 14 Framework of the hwènùxó stories

Storytelling is to perform all the way through this well-known framework of structured discourse. Actually, the performer is free to disclose manifold and multi-

¹¹⁵ CP is the abbreviation of central participant.

coloured variations within the compliant requirements of the framework of the **hwènùxó** and the opposite properties of the agents.

18. Narrative choices

This chapter describes the narrative choices of the performers. Performers use an underlying code that stems from the **Fa** divination. I will analyse how the performers use these specific clues to acknowledge specific socio-cultural codes. I will discuss whether these codes tie in with the older corpora from the Fon of Benin and stories from adjacent areas.

18.1. Clues to find the codes

The rudimentary framework is not the only feature that the stories of the corpus have in common. The stories also have an opening formula in Abomey-Calavi and Abomey, and a closing formula in Ayou.¹¹⁶ All stories have two agents. The properties of an agent may emphasize the topic of the story, for example the rooster is small but smart (Ay 6) (see 6.2.). All stories have a central participant who is capable of intervening in the course of the events, thanks to his divine properties or thanks to the diviner, who consults **Sé** the ‘guardian spirit’ through the divination of **Fa**. **Fa** appears as often in the corpus as in the previous corpora. The frequent occurrence is salient, which shows the survey that I gave in chapter 5 (see 5.5.). Each of the 256 **Fa** represents a specific metalinguistic code that refers to gods and events in times past.

Let us reconsider the similar stories of the corpus to find out what elements they have in common and in which way they differ. The similarity concerns the combination of an identical pair of agents, an identical topic and a central participant who has identical features. However, and now I come to the quintessence, the odds are in favour of a distinct storyline and plot for each of the stories. It is obvious that I have to examine the elements of similar stories to gain an insight into the narrative choices that performers made when that they told the stories.¹¹⁷

Let us consider elements and topics that I described (see chapters 5, 6 and 7). All three of the ‘Cat and leopard’-stories have the same topic, which is the taboo of eating one’s children. The topic recurs in the properties of the agents: cats do not eat their children, though leopards love prey and eat all children, at any time and at any place (see also 6.2., 6.4.). The Fon tradition considers the leopard a powerful agent, but also a bad and unreliable one of whom one had better get rid. Let us first look into the two dramatic versions of the ‘Cat and leopard’ stories told in Abomey (A 7) and in Abomey-Calavi (AC 16). The performers remove the leopard from the stories

¹¹⁶ Detailed information on framing is to be found in Babcock (1977).

¹¹⁷ The stories concerned are the three ‘Cat and leopard’ stories (AC 16, A7 and Ay 5), ‘The sadist co-wife’ (AC 2, A 5), and ‘The day to thresh the millet’ (AC 4, A 4).

by forcing her to fall off a big tree. In the Abomey-Calavi edition, the youngest kitten puts on the kettle, burns the leopard alive with the boiling water, and causes her lethal fall from the tree (AC 16). In the version told in Abomey, the youngest kitten pretends to look for lice in his aunt's hair, while he ties the hair to a branch of the tree. This branch breaks due to the heavy weight, and the leopard falls off the tree (A 7).¹¹⁸ The third 'Cat and leopard' story, the comical one from Ayou, has no tree in its plot. The performer of the comic Ayou version adds a comic song (Ay 5; see 7.3.). Each of the three performers coins different ideophones (see 14.6.). Hence, the decoy differs in two out of three stories, and does not occur in the third one. It is obvious that the performers of the three stories improvise and use a personal storyboard (see chapter 19).

Another story from Ayou stages a male leopard (Ay 7). In this story, the central participant is the trickster **Ỳg̀b̀ó** and the leopard and the termites form the pair of agents.¹¹⁹ In this story, **Ỳg̀b̀ó** uses the same ploy as the central participant from the Abomey edition of the 'Cat and leopard'-story (A 7). The youngest kitten is a small animal, a feature that he shares with the trickster. The trickster lures the leopard into a tree with the decoy that he may find a beautiful mate, after the trickster does his hair.¹²⁰ This example shows that performers know the metalinguistic code that the leopard must fall from a huge tree.¹²¹

Let us note that the 'Cat and leopard' stories are no part of previous corpora. It is probable that the performance at each of the three sites relates to the situation in Benin in 1976 (see 2.1.).

The two editions of 'The sadist co-wife' also show similarities and differences (AC 2 and A 5). The topic is identical: the jealousy of the eldest co-wife towards the new co-wife. The agents are two sides of a coin (see 5.4.). The central participant of both stories is a saucepot. However, the central participant of each edition sings a different song, although the speech in both songs is that of a noble person. A second similarity is that the first co-wife tries to break the saucepot against distinct objects. However, the type of objects differs: the Abomey-Calavi edition cites stone objects, while the Abomey edition lists wooden objects with a different function in the household.

Let us finally also consider 'The day to thresh the millet'. Both versions have the same topic and identical agents (AC 4, A 4). However, the central participant is a

¹¹⁸ See 14.6. Style

¹¹⁹ Termites refer to the ancestors.

¹²⁰ The leopard in this story is a male.

¹²¹ The leopard in the corpus has to deal with two different central participants, the youngest kitten and the trickster **Ỳg̀b̀ó**. It is important to note that these two exclude each other: they do not figure in the same story.

different character. In the Abomey-Calavi version, the bride is a boy, and in the Abomey edition, the bride is a girl with one arm (see also 5.5. and 10.2.). A second difference is that the performer in Abomey reports that a libation takes place before the ceremony of threshing the millet (A 4; see 7.5.). Both versions have similar songs.¹²²

When we scan through the stories that have no obvious similarities, we find similar features. Performers stage identical central participants and agents in completely different stories, for example, the central participant **Xɛ** ‘Prickly shrub’, figures in two stories: ‘The hunter and the chief’ and ‘The spirit man and the chief’ (Ay 1, AC 10). **Agbanlin** ‘Antelope girl’, is the central participant in a third ‘The hunter and the chief’ story (A 2). In these three stories, the performers shape the following features and elements in the same mould: the topic, the central participant and the agents. However, the performers combine distinct actions and elements with a different storyline.

The above-cited examples indicate that the performers make also narrative choices to put together the various elements of the agents and their actions, as well as the specific features of the central participant. This means that the performers use referential and meta-lingual clues that emphasize the poetic function (Jakobson 1960: 370ff.).¹²³ The analogous actions in the different stories are a combination of a referential context and a metalinguistic code, which leads to identical clues. The clues are semiotic codes and sub-codes that are part of the rural Fon sociolect; they have an array of meanings from the denotative or literal sense to the connotative or cultural association (Barthes 1966). The performer’s strategy is to select and combine the codes in a way that limits the range of meanings for the audience. It is highly probable that the combinations depend on power relations and violations of religious taboos.

One may conclude that the narrative choices of a performer involve the features of the central participant, as well as the elements that belong to the agents and **Fa**. The process of choosing is an autonomous process. Elements and features are autonomous; they occur in dramatic stories and in comic stories (see 18.1.).¹²⁴

¹²² This is also the case in the similar stories ‘Hunter Little Finger and the chief’ (Ay 1 and AC 10).

¹²³ Jakobson used the word ‘metalingual’, which is synonymous to the word ‘metalinguistic’ that I prefer.

¹²⁴ Jakobson specified the distinction between the referential function and the metalinguistic function. He considered the ‘context’ as the target factor of the referential function, while he saw the ‘code’ as the target factor of the metalinguistic function. In my view, the distinction is helpful to describe narrative choices (Jakobson 1960: 370 ff.).

18.2. Referential and metalinguistic codes in *hwènúxó*

Le Hérisse and Maupoil also discussed the differences that occur in similar stories. Both published stories that show that the agents have identical or rather similar elements and devices to the ones in the corpus. Some of the stories in the Herskovitses' corpus also show analogous features.

Maupoil cites a story about **titigotin**, 'the talkative small bird with grey feathers' who humiliates the huge elephant (Maupoil 1988: 437). This story quite resembles the story in the corpus where the boasting rooster brings down the arrogant elephant who thinks he is invincible (Ay 6). Maupoil notes that the story about the **Dobligodo** has elements that also occur in Yoruba-stories told in the West of Nigeria (Maupoil 1988: 610ff.; AC 18). His descriptions show that identical clues may occur in different plots.

I recorded in Abomey a story about the goat and the lion, in 1976. Sixty-five years earlier, Le Hérisse published a similar story (Le Hérisse 1911: 265ff.; A 6). Here again the agents are similar, but the two stories have a different plot.

Actually, the studies by Guédou and Herskovits also confirmed the lack of a well-elaborated storyline and the confusing divergence of the plots. Herskovits wondered why the storytellers told two distinct versions of a story:

The unhesitating reply was that the gods do not reveal the same things to everyone, and that each narrator was telling 'true history' according to the way the *vodun* have given it to him. In other words, belief in a single correct version does not exist. (...). Nonetheless, since in general outline a knowledge of the cosmogonic myths is widespread, the variants, though differing in the role assigned each protagonist or in the phrasing of the issues involved, are yet so clearly structured that they incorporate the same progressions of incidents, the same actors, and the same final solution. (Herskovits and Herskovits 1970: 18; italics in the original).

Guédou remarked that Fon stories are no complete formulas that one can passively repeat:

Ce sont des créations auxquelles chaque conteur peut ajouter quelque chose s'il le juge conforme à l'esprit de la parole. Ce sont des matériaux disponibles que chaque génération adapte à son temps, à ses réalités et à ses aspirations. Ils sont perméables. (Guédou 1985: 449).

There are many examples of details that the performers arbitrarily insert in stories. Details reflect passionate emotions that vary from jealousy to greed. Indeed, previous corpora show many elements and details that are similar to the ones in the corpus.

18.3. Referential and metalinguistic codes in West Africa

Several publications confirm the number of variations that are similar to the variations that I found in the corpus. I cited Herskovits and Guédou, but there are also examples that go far beyond the borders of the present-day Fongbe territory. Goody discussed myths and their relation to other aspects of social life. In his analysis of the Bagre of the Lo Dagaa of northern Ghana, he emphasized that each story has several versions and that variation is the rule in these ritual stories (Goody 2010: 99). Goody also confirmed the temporarily change from a god into an animal or a human being (Goody 2010: 88).

Goody is not the only author who discussed the variations of features and elements in West African mythology. There is more proof to find in several corpora that have been collected west of the present Republic of Benin. Verdier and Konrad showed similar elements to the ones in the corpus in their publications of stories from Togo, told in several languages (Verdier 1973; Konrad 1994).

Elements in Trickster Stories

The publication of stories from Togo by Verdier provides us with a number of interesting similar and recognizable analogous elements. The first example shows that two elements from one story of Verdier's corpus occur in two different trickster stories in the corpus. The first element is that in the House of Rain in the Land of Sky, the huts are made of white beans puree, just like the huts in a Mina story that Verdier cites (Ay 3; Verdier 1973, II: 238). A second element is that in the House of Water in the Marsh, which is the habitat of the ancestors, balls made of **akassa** are a children's toy (Verdier 1973, II: 224ff.).¹²⁵ This reminds us of the children who play a ball game with balls made of **akassa** in the House of Rain in the Land of Sky, which is also the habitat of the ancestors (Ay 3).

A second example shows that elements from trickster stories also occur in dramatic stories. These elements consist of paraphernalia that have magic or spiritual properties. Verdier mentions a trickster story about famine, in which the Chief of the House of Water gives **Yo** a dinner plate and a formula that goes with it. Each time that he pronounces the formula, the plate will supply him with food. However, he must always comply with the following condition: he should always discard the leftovers, after he ate to his fill. All goes well, until the children of **Yo** want to use the plate. When they pronounce the formula for a third time, the plate refuses to supply them with any food. They had failed to throw the leftovers away and to clean

¹²⁵ This is a Kotokoli story, from Sokode, that is in the Northeastern part of Togo, West of the Beninese Djougou, where people speak Dendi.

up the plate. **Yo** returns to the Chief of the House of Water to get support, and thereupon he gets a rope and a rod to punish his children. This fragment reminds us of the magic formula and the devices that helped **Dosu** to escape from his poverty (AC 3). The guardian spirit **Sé** gives **Dosu** a goat and a formula that will provide him with wealth. This formula is identical to the one in the story cited by Verdier, granted that the performer replaced the word 'plate' with the word 'goat'. **Dosu** inadvertently tells the secret formula to the owner of a restaurant who steals his wealth. The robbery happens once more, this time the object is a wooden statuette. However, the third time the guardian spirit gives **Dosu** a fish basket, and a rope and a rod to punish the culprits. It is salient that similar elements occur in a dramatic story and in a comic story. On the other hand, both stories have an identical topic: famine. Both stories show how the gods are able to solve the problem of shortage.

The Yǎgbó stories and the Yiyi stories in Ewegbe

One can establish many similarities between **Yǎgbó** stories in the corpus and Konrad's publication of comic Ewe stories that stage **Yiyi** as the central participant. Here again, **Yǎgbó** stories share elements with **Yiyi** stories. Konrad published a story about a contest to win the three daughters of the chief. In this story, the lizard that is the cousin of the spider **Yiyi** tries to betray the secret that the trickster cut the chief's tongue. Thereupon the trickster charges him with the crime and cuts the lizard's tongue (Konrad 1994: 149ff.). These elements also occur in two different trickster stories told in Ayou. The first example concerns the story called 'our first story' that tells about the contest of the Great Spirit god who wants to marry off his three daughters to one husband, and organizes a contest. The trickster **Ye** spies upon the king and conceives a trick to enable his stepbrother to win the contest and the world, half of the universe of the Great Spirit (Ay 2). The second example from Ayou is about the grey lizard that loses his tongue, when he is about to betray that the trickster killed a small ferocious animal. The lizard is killed (Ay 8). In both stories, the unfortunate lizard is punished for a crime he did not commit; it cost him his life.

18.4. Conclusions on referential and metalinguistic codes

One may conclude that the practice of putting identical features and elements in different stories occurs far beyond the Fon region in Benin. The publications about older West African corpora show that the performers insert analogous elements in similar stories, but also in different stories. The similarity of an identical topic and agents is a common heritage.

The analysis of the corpus confirms the findings of previous publications on West African storytelling, that there is no ideal version of a story. The authors who analysed corpora of West African stories confirm the absence of a fixed storyline.

From the unanimity of the descriptions, it is evident that the stories told in West Africa have no ideal storyline, but are improvised variations. This confirms the analysis that the heart of the performance of Fongbe storytelling is an improvisation that the performer shapes on the devices of the **Fa** divination.

Conclusively, the stories are subject to considerable variation, but the codes that are used, are identical. It is very plausible that performers use metalinguistic codes.

In the performers' opinion similar **hwènùxó** are identical. It is plausible that the performers feel that the occurrence of a number of identical codes that refer to analogous features and elements define the story as identical.

19. The concept of the storyboard

Let us consider the final issue, which is the technique that facilitates performers to make narrative choices. I discussed how the performers create the story in front of the audience by deciding on the appropriate sequence of actions. They improvise and concatenate chunks in the framework of the story. Nonetheless, they have an appealing stage presence that shows off an agile and professional performance. The technique that gives the performance a finesse that thrills the audience makes me think of a storyboard.

The way the performer creates the **hwènúxó** is best to describe with the technique of a storyboard. Originally, a storyboard is the first version of a film script that helps to visualize the sequence of scenes of a story. It consists of a series of panels that outline the major succession of actions (see 1.5.3.). The technique is widely used in the media industry. The storyboard is also used to describe all kind of processes as a succession of separate steps. However, the technique depicts all the successive actions, reactions, new facts etcetera that build the story. This makes it an appropriate metaphor to describe the storytelling process of the **hwènúxó**. Of course, this is a mental process for the performers. It is not a graphic organizer with real panels of rough sketches with instructions, arrows and pictures.

One may well argue that each panel of the storyboard coincides with a paragraph in the corpus (see part 3). Notice that the majority of literary analyses uses terms that are used to describe written or printed material, such as script and scenario. These terms imply that the performers wrote something down which was not the case. They made no notes; the majority of the performers was illiterate. I prefer the metaphor of the storyboard to describe the mental process of creating verbal art.

Let us consider each performance as an event in itself. It is a ‘configuration space’ that accommodates the central participant, the agents and their actions. This configuration space has the following properties: it is the set where the current story moves forward, while it also conveys the events from times past and the talking about these events.

I discussed how style visualizes the telling of a story (see chapter 14). Besides language usage, there is more to say about visualization. The performers focus the story and the timing in several key frames. On the one hand, visualization involves the positioning in the story. First, the pivotal positioning of the central participant increases his success. He is the decisive factor of the story. The performer contrasts the central participant with the pair of agents. The performer depicts the central participant as a sentient individual. Unlike the central participant, the agents have neither thoughts nor emotions. The performer depicts them as functions: they are a king, a hunter or an orphan. This way, the performer conveys what is happening and what is about to happen.

Nevertheless, the set-up of the storyboard is submitted to a number of rules. The performer first has to choose the following elements: the topic, the **Fa**, the agents and the referential and metalinguistic codes, as well as the central participant. That is the way that the performer defines the plot, or the sequential scenes. (S)he has to keep in mind the basic framework of the **hwènúxó** (see chapter 17). The successive elements of the framework determine a series of panels that the performer cannot ignore. However, the performers have the freedom to improvise. They may add panels, for example they may insert a scoop about a painful incident, after the introduction of the agents at the start of the story (see chapter 17). They may also freely link recurrent sequences after the peak. They also may add a song to the denouement. At the same time, the performer has to follow the rules that govern the structuring of the discourse, the use of pauses and the particle *ó* as well as the grammatical rules as described in part 3 of this book. Finally, the performer can add stylistic elements to each of the panels of the storyboard to keep the attention of the audience (see the chapters on style).

I gave examples of the use of referential and metalinguistic codes in completely different stories from different parts in West Africa in the previous chapter. The codes are widely spread. Therefore, I assume that the technique that I describe as a storyboard also travelled over the ancient trade routes where traders transported their commerce and staple food.

Verdier gets the credit for defining the Togolese story as the putting together of arbitrarily chosen adventures whose only relation is the ‘character who has the title-role of each adventure’ (Verdier 1973, II: 33ff.). The storyboard is a more explicit metaphor than ‘le conte à tiroirs’ that Verdier introduced in his analysis.

I may add that there is more than one relation.

The performance of a story is an improvisation that bases itself on a series of panels that together form a mental storyboard. The spread of topics and elements outside Benin, in a greater part of West Africa supports the assumption of the use of the storyboard technique. However, putting together all the elements to build a story and to apply the strict rules of language use makes the performance verbal art.

Final remarks

20. Final remarks

The main objective of this book is to understand the techniques and skills of the performers, and to find out how they structure the narrative discourse of the **hwènùxó**. I will first present the major conclusions concerning the nature of the stories. Subsequently, I will elaborate the interaction between the different approaches that I used and the way these results fit together and lead to the conclusions. Lastly, I will draw some conclusions on the performance itself.

There are ten main conclusions to be drawn.

Conclusion 1

The stories show many references to the former kingdom of **Danxomè** and the two major pantheons and their cults. The principle of duality is crucial. A great number of stories refer to the important role of divination. The stories reflect the diviner's devices that are important in the Fon society. It means that the stories often have an underlying meaning that is only understandable if one knows the meaning of the symbols that are used. The major topics are power and the violation of taboos. The performers say that the stories relate to events that happened in the distant past and to imaginary events that might have happened. The nature of the stories is religious, and they belong to the Fon belief system.

Conclusion 2

Each story features a central participant who impersonates the supernatural or divine power and who solves the problem one way or another. The central participant is actually the only character of the story, for the performer depicts him, unlike the agents, as a sentient individual.

All stories stage a pair of agents that illustrates the topic. They act as a vehicle that moves the story forward. The pair of agents is bipolar, like two sides of a coin. The agents portray functions in the Fon society. Agents have paraphernalia that refer to one of the **Fa**, a set of 256 religious devices that have specific religious properties.

Conclusion 3

The performers are free to choose his topic, the agents and the central participant as well as the way their features interact. At the same time, these features and the **Fa** that associates with them limit their liberty: the effects are predictable to the listener. Each performer can put together a performance by using variations on the features of the agents without changing the elements itself.

Conclusion 4

All stories develop a plot along a rudimentary framework of rhetorical devices. The performers in Abomey-Calavi and Abomey often use an opening formula to start the story. On the other hand, the performers in Ayou use a fixed formula at the end of the story. The framework consists of the peak, a repetition of the incident, the denouement and the end: the penalty of one of the agents.

Conclusion 5

The performer may choose to repeat the sequence that reports the peak just once. However, performers may also add digressions, and continue to tell up to three recurrent sequences of the peak. The performer is free to repeat a specific action or to make a deviation before arriving at the denouement. The performances show that it is up to the individual performer to extend the framework with manifold and multi-coloured variations within the requirements of the configuration space of the topic and the properties of and the agents. This free-for-all regime is left to the improvisation skills of the performer. Performers may add songs that give a moral explanation.

Conclusion 6

Similar stories have a similar topic, and an identical central participant and the same pair of agents. All versions of similar stories show the same rudimentary framework. However, each performance delivers a distinct story. The versions in the corpus are different editions of the story. Nonetheless, in the view of the performers the similar editions of **hwènùxó** are identical. It is plausible that the performers feel that the occurrence of a number of identical elements and codes define the story as identical.

Conclusion 7

Performers structure the discourse by a pattern of pauses and by the use of the clause-final topic **ǎ**. The performer applies specific rules to indicate new information. The performer also uses a wide range of stylistic devices to keep the attention of the audience.

Conclusion 8

The storytelling sessions that I recorded are events in their own right, in which the adult audience actively participates. The audience appreciates the improvisations and interacts with the performer to show approval. The performer may ask the audience for confirmation as well. On the other hand, the audience may intervene with cheers to encourage or the audience reacts with cries of horror. These performances are no part of a religious ceremony.

Conclusion 9

The **hwènùxó** are improvised performances, that are not based on written texts. The **hwènùxó** are either dramatic or comic stories. The gender of the performer defines the nature of the stories. Women performers told the dramatic stories, men performers mainly told comic stories.

Conclusion 10

Hwènùxó is part of the West African verbal art. It is an indigenous mythological genre of the Fon from Benin. It conveys the Fon belief system and its practices, such as the divination and the consultation of the oracle **Fa**.

One of my basic assumptions was that storytelling was an ad hoc performance and not a show based on a written text. I therefore decided that a multi-angle approach was required to analyse these stories. The approach involved an ethnographic and a linguistic approach, the description of style in language, as well as the analysis of the technique of the performer to create the performance. I gave a systematic overview of the results in an orderly series of chapters. However, the coherence and interaction between the results of each of the approaches remained underexposed, for the results of one analysis influenced the outcome of another analysis in many ways, either by limiting the options or by confirming an interpretation. I will sum up the most salient results.

The timing of the length of pauses between utterances and the frequent use of the particle **ǎ** are one of the most striking features when listening to the recordings. I started to analyse the discourse by analysing the pauses between the utterances. The interpretation of the graphical representation and the underlying statistical analyses showed that the performers use a pattern of pauses. This pattern is the main content marker of the narrative discourse. The understanding of the timing greatly contributed to the understanding of the story and the translation of the story into an English text. Furthermore, the performers are structuring the discourse by a multifunctional use of the particle **ǎ**. The particle is used as a clause-final marker to convey the end of old information and the announcement of new information. The particle is also used at the end of a noun phrase as a definite marker to track and trace the central participant throughout the story. Finally, the particle is used to topicalize one of the agents.

At the same time, the ethnographic approach made it possible to acknowledge roles and symbols in the stories and to understand the religious meaning.

Performers also use extensive pauses to highlight rhetorical phenomena. This made it clear what the performers considered as the peak of the story and allowed me to find the basic framework of the stories.

The linguistic analyses provided a wealth of tools used by the performers. The linguistic analyses also showed that there is a distinction between the formal Fongbe grammar rules and the language usage in performance.

The similar stories in the corpus allowed me to find the elements that they had in common, and why they were still different stories. This in turn led to the insight that identical referential and metalinguistic codes elements can be found in otherwise completely different stories.

The corpus has about 57 000 words. This enabled me to do a number of different analyses. It would not have revealed so much of itself as for this multi angle approach.

The final question is, how does the performer create the performance? One of the main features of the performance is the systematic structuring of the discourse. The performer alternately gives the floor to one of the agents. The performance is an improvisation that gives the impression of a spontaneous creation in situ. It is quite the contrary, the traditional framework of the **hwènúxó** and the language usage support the improvisation. I found that stories from various parts of West Africa have identical referential and metalinguistic codes to the Fon stories from Benin. This brought along the assumption that a performer uses a mental storyboard.

The storyboard technique is a metaphor of the performer's thing when creating the performance. The performers choose the panels that they mentally perceive as the scenic sequences of the story. First, they choose a central participant, a topic and a pair of agents. Thereafter, they arrange the features of the central participant and the elements of the agents that they need for the intrigue. They subsequently create a mental panel for each of the steps in the story. In other words, they create the story by concatenating chunks in the performance. Conclusively, the achieved performers fill up the rudimentary framework with improvised digressions that fit in with the features of the central participant and the elements of the agents.

The performers use techniques that show that they master the art of communication. They use the techniques that we know from the diverse fields of stand-up comedians and anchors, but also from literature. The combination of techniques that, in our eyes, belong to different genres makes the performance of verbal art so attractive.

The performance brings to mind the present-day TV-soap series. The features of the central participant, the elements of the agents and the use of rhetorical phenomena visualize the story and its intrigue. This is how the stereotypical features of the characters in a soap series predict the next scenes of the soap. The performance itself

resembles the performance of the present-day stand-up comedian who masters the skills of drawing the audience's attention and succeeds in keeping it. This keeping of attention is close to the efforts of TV-producers who want to maximize the number of watchers of their soap series. Their success is identical to the success that Fongbe performers of verbal art used to have.

The performance of verbal art from the Fon of Benin reflects the Fon society and its traditions. The performance requires a thorough knowledge of the **Fa** cult. It also requires the skills to take into account the rules and the codes and to deliver a narrative that the audience appreciates. The performance of **hwènùxó** is an elaborate art.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The performers and the performances

Performer	Age & Occupation	Date of recording	Time of the day	Story	Song
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Performers in Ayou

Klikpo Cece	1904 traditional doctor	12-4-1976	morning	Ay 1	song
Klikpo Cece		27-4-1976	morning	Ay 2	2 songs
Klikpo Cece		27-4-1976	morning	Ay 3	
Klikpo Cece		27-4-1976	morning	Ay 4	
Klikpo Louis	1906 traditional doctor, tailor	30-4-1976	morning	Ay 5	song
Klikpo Louis		30-4-1976	morning	Ay 6	
Klikpo Louis		30-4-1976	morning	Ay 7	song
Klikpo Louis		30-4-1976	morning	Ay 8	song

Performers in Abomey-Calavi (women)

Zomagba Clémentine	1901	4-5-1976	evening	AC 1	song
Zomagba Clémentine		4-5-1976	evening	AC 3	
Zomagba Clémentine		8-6-1976	evening	AC 12	
Zomagba Clémentine		8-6-1976	evening	AC 13	
Zomagba Clémentine		8-6-1976	evening	AC 15	
Zomagba Clémentine		8-6-1976	evening	AC 17	
Zomagba Avosɛhwe	1940	4-5-1976	evening	AC 2	song
Zomagba Avosɛhwe		18-5-1976	evening	AC 7	song
Zomagba Avosɛhwe		18-5-1976	evening	AC 8	song
Zomagba Avosɛhwe		8-6-1976	evening	AC 19	3 songs
Agbazamasihùn Valentine	ca 1936	4-5-1976	evening	AC 4	song
Adekadjou Falilatu	1941	8-6-1976	evening	AC 14	
Adekadjou Falilatu		8-6-1976	evening	AC 16	
Adekadjou Falilatu		8-6-1976	evening	AC 18	

Performers in Abomey-Calavi (men)

Dottou Afɔ̀kpɔ̀ Symphorien	ca 1930, wanderer	18-5-1976	evening	AC5	song
Akɔ̀tɔ̀xoto François	1958	18-5-1976	evening	AC 6	
Dansou Kiki François	1951, hand	3-6-1976	evening	AC 9	song
Dansou Kiki François		3-6-1976	evening	AC 10	song
Dansou Kiki François			evening	AC 11	

Performer	Age & Occupation	Date of recording	Time of the day	Story	Song
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Performers in Abomey (women)

Tokoudagba Nage	1895	16-6-1976	morning	A 2	song
Tokoudagba Nage		16-6-1976	morning	A 3	2 songs
Tokoudagba Nage		16-6-1976	morning	A 4	song
Tokoudagba Nage		16-6-1976	morning	A 5	song
Tokoudagba Vividemε	1926	16-6-1976	morning	A 6	
Tokoudagba Vividemε		16-6-1976	morning	A 7	song
Tokoudagba Tuna	girl 1972	16-6-1976	morning	A 9	

Performers in Abomey (men)

Cebesi Daniel	cook	14-6-1976	afternoon	A 1	
Tokoudagba Dossento	1916	16-6-1976	morning	A 8	
Tokoudagba ?	boy 1966	16-6-1976	morning	A 10	

Appendix 2: The day to thresh the millet (Abomey 4)

The day to thresh the millet (A 4)

P 1 Introduction

1. **onya dɛ we tɛn** [2.29]
man INDF aFOC exist
'There was a man'
2. **b̀ nya ɔ**
CJds man TOP_N
'and this man'
3. **é zɛ hwɛ** [1.89]
CL₃ break threshold
'he went for a walk'
4. **bo jǎwè xwé** [1.47] [flashback]
CJss be.just.about.arrive household
'and he was about to come back home'
5. **bo m̀ yɔkpɔ ɔ** [1.4]
CJss find young.girl DEF
'and he found this girl'
6. **o yɔkpɔ nyɔ ɖɛkpe** [0.18]
IJ young.girl be.good beauty
'oh! the girl was so beautiful'
7. **kákákákáká**
very.much
'extraordinarily beautiful'
8. **b'ɛ ɖ̀**
CJds.CL₃ say
'and he said'
9. **kóoyi**
well
'well'

P 3

20. **é d̥è mǎ nùgbó é ́** [1.52]CL₃ say thus truth RES TOP_{CL}

‘when he said so, I am speaking the truth’

21. **é dà yǎkpó ́** [2.72] [flash forward]CL₃ marry young.girl DEF

‘he married the girl in question’

22. **b’é wá yì xwé** [1.24]CJss.CL₃ come.to go home

‘and he returned back home’

P 4

23. **é dà yǎkpó ́ wá yì xwé é ɔ**CL₃ marry young.girl DEF come go household CL₃ TOP_{CL}

‘after he married the girl, he took her home’ [2.71]

[tail-head construction: 21 + 22 + 23]

24. **asi t̥n** [2.58]

wife GEN

‘his first wife’

25. **wá kan byó d̥ɔ ji lé**

come search ask say CP CP

‘came asking, saying that’

26. **nè ká gbɛn b̥**

WH but pass CJds

‘now what was going on and’

27. **é jà wù le gbé ́ é mó nó yl̥**CL₃ be.about body bath PURP TOP_{CL} CL₃ NEG RM ask**m̥ d̥é nú é nó súnsún negbe n’í ’jí**person INDEF give CL₃ RM scrub back give.CL₃ ID

‘when she (=the new wife) was about to have a bath, that she did not once ask somebody to scrub her back for her’ [2.78] [cliff hanger]

P 5

28. **b'é** **ɖə** **ji** **lě** **mɛ** **ɖé** **ma** **kən** **nə** **súnsún**
CJds.CL₃ say CP CJ person SPEC NEG but RM scrub

nɛgbé **nú** **mɛ** **ɔ́** **ɖò**
back give person DEF be

‘and the man said that if nobody ever scrubbed somebody’s else’s back’
[tail-head]

29. **xwé** **à** **ɔ́** [2.16] [flashback]
household NEG TOP_{CL}
‘back home’

30. **din** **wè** **mɛ**
now aFOC sorry
‘now was the moment, wasn’t it’

31. **lé** **ɔ́** **ná** **wá** **húzú** **ají** [1.92]
CP DEF IRM come.to change ID
‘that this would be changed’

P 6

32. **é** **ɖò** **mò** **é** **ɔ́** [1.96]
CL₃ say thus RES TOP_{CL}
‘when he said those words’
[tail-head construction summarizing: 28, 29, 30, 31 = 32]

33. **'si** **towé** **ɔ́**
woman POS₂ TOP_N
‘your woman’

34. **xoxó** **ɔ́** **só** **kè** **nu** **ǎ** [1.87]
old DEF lift open mouth NEG
‘the first wife did not argue’

P 7

35. **yɔ̀kpó** **ɔ́** **fən** **ɔ́** [0.34]
young.girl DEF wake.up TOP_{CL}
‘when the young girl woke up’

36. **é nọ yí lè wǔ tòn** [1.99]
 CL₃ RM get bath body GEN
 ‘she took a bath once more’
37. **bó nọ sọ nù** [1.03]
 CJss RM take thing
 ‘and she took her trade once more’
38. **bó nọ yì axì tòn** [1.73]
 CJss RM go market GEN
 ‘and she went once more to the market she always went to’
- P 8
39. **bò gbe ɖokpó wá sù** [0.53]
 CJds day one come.to arrive
 ‘and one day’
40. **b’é kó yì lè wǔ** [1.87] [flash forward]
 CJss. CL₃ OSM get bath body
 ‘she had already taken a bath’
41. **bó kó yì axì** [1.17]
 CJss OSM go market
 ‘and she had already gone to the market’
42. **asisi tòn ọ é ɖò do ba n’í wé**
 co-wife GEN TOP_N CL₃ AUX hole look.for give.CL₃ pFOC
41. **é ọ** [0.73] [topic]
 RES TOP_{CL}
 ‘that co-wife of hers, she tried to find fault with the new wife’
43. **é sọ hliké** [0.64]
 CL₃ take knife
 ‘she took a knife’
44. **bó yí** [0.28]
 CJss get
 ‘and she raised her hand’

45. **dó do tɔn mɛ** [0.53]
put wall GEN LOC
'to put it in the wall of the girl's bathroom'

46. **bo lílílílé lílílé lílé** [1.39]
CJss turn turn turn
'and she kept on turning, turning, turning'

47. **b̀ ali ́ tɔn j̀ fi e o yɔkpó ́**
CJds path DEF pierce fell place REL IJ young.girl DEF

nó ǹ bó nó l̀ ẁ é [1.58]
RM stay CJss RM bath body CL₃

'and the peephole appeared in the wall of the place where oh the young girl
always stayed, taking her bath' [peak]

48. **b'́ é lé ś ǹ ś d'́ é nu** [1.98]
CJds.CL₃ repeat take thing close apply.CL₃ LOC
'and she refilled the hole, closing it,' [peak]

49. **bo jo dó** [2.35] [cliff hanger]
CJss leave put
'she left it at that'

P 9

50. **b'ayì h́ ɔn** [2.08]
CJds.earth open
'and the next day, at dawn'

51. **b̀ yɔkpó tówé yì xɔ gúdo** [1.31]
CJds young.girl POS₂ go hut LOC
'(and) your girl went behind the hut'

52. **bó kó yì ẁ lé gbé** [1.31]
CJss OSM go body bath PURP
'and she had already washed herself'

53. **b'́ é sé e kó ɔ̀ sin wún dó wũ wè** [1.32]
CJds.CL₃ hear CL₃ OSM AUX water draw apply body pFOC
'and the first wife heard that she had already drawn water to wash herself'

54. **bó yí hùn nù sín** [0.77]
 CJss get open mouth ORIG
 ‘and she opened the opening of’
55. **ali é tón é nú** [0.88]
 path REL pierce CL₃ give.to
 ‘the peephole that she made in the wall’ [cliff hanger]
- P 10
56. **e hùn nù sín é nú é ɔ** [0.96]
 CL₃ open mouth ORIG REL give CL₃ TOP_{CL}
 ‘after she opened the opening of the peephole in front of her’
 [tail-head construction: 54 + 55 = 56]
57. **é m̀d̀ nũ j̀è ỳɔkp̀ɔ́ ɔ́ wú bí** [1.32]
 CL₃ see thing fall young.girl DEF GEN.body QF
 ‘she saw the body of the girl completely’ [flash forward]
58. **bó m̀ɔ́ ɖ̀d̀ awa ɖ̀ɔkp̀ɔ́nɔ́** [1.48]
 CJss see CP arm unique
 ‘and she saw that she had only one arm’
59. **bo ɖ̀'áhɛɛn**
 CJss say.well
 ‘and she said I see’
60. **hũn nũ é m̀ɔ́ nɔ́ l̀è wũ ɖ̀d̀ wexo a** [1.38]
 so thing CL₃ NEG RM bath body be publicly NEG
- éné áji**
 DEI ID
 ‘so that is why she did not publicly take a bath, there you are’
61. **bo sú** [0.91]
 CJss close
 ‘and she closed’
62. **nũ ali ɔ́ nu** [1.01]
 thing road DEF GEN.edge
 ‘down the opening of the peephole’

63. **bo wa so** [2.61] [flash forward]
CJss come again
'and she hurried back again'
64. **b'asú yètón wá xwé** [1.1]
CJds.husband 3PL.GEN come household
'and their husband came home'
65. **b'é dǒ n'í dǒ ji** [1.92]
CJds.CL₃ say give. CL₃ CP CP
'and she said to him that'
66. **lé azǎn**
CP 24.hours
'that in'
67. **tantǎn gbe lè sú ǒ** [1.48] [flash forward]
eight PURP REL close TOP_{CL}
'eight days from now'¹²⁶
68. **e nà sǒ lì** [2.13] [cliff hanger]
INDF IRM thresh millet
'one would thresh the millet'

P 11

69. **lé nùkún e só é ǒ bì kó vò**
CI grain INDF thresh RES TOP_{CL} QF OSM finish
'that after the grain was threshed, the affair was all over and done with'
[1.66]¹²⁷

[Audience:]

70. **nyǎnú xóxó-'né dǒ mǒ dǒ wε-'ne**
woman old-DEM_R AUX thus say pFOC-DEM_R
'that was that old woman who said that'
71. **nyǎnú xó ǒ-'né dǒ mǒ dǒ wε-'ne** [1.41]
woman old DEF-DEM_R AUX thus say pFOC-DEM_R
'that was that old bag that said that'

¹²⁶ Note that this means two weeks.

¹²⁷ Note that the performer uses TOP_{CL} without a pause, for a flash forward follows.

72. **lé e nà só** [0.74]
CP INDF IRM grind
'that one would thresh'
73. **li dɛ̀ji** [1.08]
millet ID
'the millet'
74. **dó do e é kó mɔ́ nú** [1.12]
apply hole RES CL₃ OSM see thing
'through the peephole she had already seen the single arm'
75. **nyɔ̀nú yaɖé-yaɖé bo dɔ́ n'asisi tɔ́n lé**
GEN.woman new-new CJss say give-co-wife GEN PL

é wú [1.48]
CL₃ body
'of the new woman and she told her co-wives'
[flash forward]
76. **bò asisi tɔ́n lé bǐ d'ácéjǐ** [1.43] [flash forward]
CJss co-wife GEN PL all be-on.the.alert
'and all her co-wives were on the alert'
77. **bo nyɔ̀wen dɔ́ li so gbe ko su**
CJss sister.in.law say millet thresh GEN.day OSM arrive

gbe'né ɔ́ gbé ɔ́ [0.25]
day-DEM_R DEF PURP TOP_{CL}

and the sisters-in-law said: when the day to thresh the millet had actually arrived, that very day'
78. **e nǎ mɔ̀** [0.43]
CL₃ IRM see
'one would'
79. **do n'í kpé** [1.62][cliff hanger]
hole give.CL₃ be.enough
'finally find out about her'

P 12

80. **é cí m̀ é ́** [5.39] tail head

CL₃ stay thus RES TOP_{CL}

‘when this was the present state of affairs’

81. **oo**

MDM [voiceless]

‘ooh!’

82. **nya towe ́** [1.28] [cliff hanger]

man POS₂ TOP_N

‘your man’

83. **ado hu i káká b’ε ̀ ně é mí ká ná wà**

fear kill CL₃ until CJss.CL₃ say WH LOG but IRM do

nũ ye gben ̀ gbε me din eji [1.42] [cliff hanger]

thing spirit pass be life LOC now ID

‘he was scared to death, and he said but what would he do, now how would he manage to stay alive?’

84. **e nà só ò** [0.63]

3SG IRM thresh millet

‘one would thresh the millet’

85. **an é kún wà nù ̀ dé ó** [1.15]

MDM[voiceless] CL₃ NEG do thing SPEC NEG

‘aye! He could not stop this special ceremony’

86. **bó ̀ mǎ** [0.34]

CJss say thus

‘and he said this to her’

P 13

87. **é nya towe dɔ̀ m̀ é ɔ́** [2.98]
 CI man POS say thus RES TOP_{CL}
 ‘after your man said so’
 [tail-head construction: 86 = 87]
88. **é kplá yɔ̀kpó ɔ́** [1.4]
 CL₃ accompany young.girl DEF
 ‘he accompanied the young wife’
89. **b̀ yě yì bokɔ̀nɔ̀ xwé** [1.85] [flash forward]
 CJds 3PL go diviner GEN.household
 ‘and they went to see the diviner’
90. **b'é yí** [0.24]
 CJds.CL₃ get
 ‘and the man asked’
91. **kan fa** [1.3]
 consult fa
 ‘to consult the Fa’
92. **b̀ bokɔ̀nɔ̀ dɔ̀ jí** [1.41]
 CJds diviner say CP
 ‘and the diviner said that’
93. **é nà yí xú** [0.18]
 CL₃ give get bone
 ‘the man had to provide bones’
94. **kandé nukún dɔ̀kpó** [1.8] [flash forward]
 40 grain one
 ‘forty-one’
95. **amiwó kandé nukún dɔ̀kpó** [1.62] [flash forward]
 oil.porridge 40 grain one
 ‘forty-one pieces of red porridge’

96. **b'ε** **nà** **hén** **wá** **b'émí** **ná** [0.38]
 CJds.CL₃ give hold come.to CJds-LOG IRM
 'and he had to bring them and that he (= diviner) would'

97. **sá** **vò** **ná** **n'i** [1.35] [flash forward]
 apply sacrifice give give- CL₃
 'sacrifice them for her'

98. **bo** **na** **wá** **bló** **nǔ** **dò** [0.1]
 CJss IRM come.to do thing be
 'and he would heal'

99. **awa-wú** **n'ĩ** [0.8]
 arm-GEN.body LOC.CL₃
 'her arm'

100. **bò** **awa** **na** **sɔ-gbe** **déji** [1.17] [cliff hanger]
 CJds arm IRM equal-voice ID
 'and the arm would be perfect'

P 14

101. **é** **dò** **mǔ** **nùgbó** **é** **ś** [3.26] [flash forward]
 CL₃ say thus truth RES TOP_{CL}
 'after the diviner said this, I am speaking the truth'

102. **e** **mǐ** **amiwó** **ś** **kandé** **lisa** **ś** [0.92]
 CL₃ make.balls red.porridge TOP_{CL} 40 god.Sun DEF
 'the man rolled red porridge balls, the forty-one sacred ones'

103. **o** **xú** **kandé** **lisa** **ś** **je-ji** [1.15] [flash forward]
 IJ bone 40 god.Sun DEF to.be.added-to
 'oh! on top of the balls, there were also the forty-one sacred bones'

104. **b'é** **fó** **bó** **yì** **bokónó** **ś** **xwé**
 CJss. CL₃ gather.1.by.1 CJss go diviner DEF GEN.household
 'and he gathered them one by one and they went to the diviner'
 [1.25] [flash forward]

105. **nùgbó** **b'é** **bló** **nù** **ś** [0.7]
 truth CJds. CL₃ do ceremony DEF
 'I am speaking the truth, and the diviner did that ceremony'

P 15

106. **é e blò nù é ́** [5.05] [tail-head]
 CI CL₃ do ceremony RES TOP_{CL}
 ‘after the diviner did that ceremony’ [start of denouement]
107. **yě jè xwé’li xò** [1.26]
 3PL fall go-path GEN.hut
 ‘they went back home’
108. **yè wá jè honto-gbó jí é ́** [1.27]
 3PL come fall treshold-big LOC RES TOP_{CL}
 ‘when they got at the gate’
109. **e hùn hən ́** [0.72]
 CL₃ open door DEF
 ‘after they opened the door’¹²⁸
110. **avun dè hǎan ́** [0.54]
 dog say ONO TOP_{CL}
 ‘every time that a dog growled’¹²⁹
111. **e nɔ́ sɔ́ xú dɔkpó** [0.92]
 CL₃ RM take bone one
 ‘at their turn, they took a bone’
112. **amiwɔ́ dɔkpó** [0.53]
 oil.porridge one
 ‘and a red porridge ball’
113. **bó nɔ́ sɔ́ ny’ayí** [1.27]
 CJss RM take throw-ground
 ‘to throw on the ground again and again’
114. **e hùn dè ́** [0.34] [breaking news]
 CL₃ open SPEC TOP_{CL}
 ‘when they opened the other doors’

¹²⁸ In this clause, the performer did not nasalize the definite marker. Furthermore, **hǎan** is one of the rare onomatopoeias in the corpus.

¹²⁹ The dog symbolizes the god **Légbà**. They growl: **hǎan**. This is a meta-discourse marker that means anger and indignation (see p.181).

115. **é** **ɔ̃** **hǎn** **ɔ́** [0.59] [breaking news]
 CL₃ say ONO TOP_{CL}
 ‘every time that a dog growled’
116. **e** **nɔ́** **sɔ́** **xú** **ɔ̃kɔ́pó** **amiwɔ́** **ɔ̃kɔ́pó** [0.37]
 CL₃ RM take bone one oil.porridge one
 ‘they took a bone and a ball of red porridge
 [breaking news]
117. **sɔ́** **ny’ayĩ** [0.28] [breaking news]
 take throw.ground
 ‘and threw them on the ground’
118. **b’ɛ** **ɔ̃** **mɔ́** **bló** **wé** **kákákáká** **bò** [1.8]
 CJss AUX thus do pFOC until CJds
 ‘and they continued to do this for a long time until’
119. **kandé** **lisa** **ɔ́** [1.8]
 40 god.Sun DEF
 ‘the sacred forty-one sacrifices’
120. **bĩ** **vò** [1.79] [denouement]
 all finish
 ‘were completely finished’
121. **b’é** **ɔ̃** **éne** [0.58]
 CJds.CL₃ say DEI
 ‘and the man said there you are!’

[Audience:]

122. **hũn** **hɔ́n** **kandé** **lisa** **w’ɛ** **hùn**
 MDM door 40 god.Sun pAUX.CL₃ open
 ‘right so! They opened forty-one doors thanks to the god Sun’
123. **un** [= ɛɛn]
 yes
 ‘yes’

P 16

124. **é** [0.14]

CI

‘when’

[Audience:]

125. **bo le m̀ avũn kanđé lisa ne** [flashback]CJss repeat find dog 40 god.Sun DEM_R

‘and they found these forty-one dogs at each door’

126. **éne** [0.71]

DEI

‘there you are’

127. **é** [0.91]

CI

‘when’

128. **azã ́ so-gbè nùgbó é ́** [2.12] [flash forward]day DEF millet-day truth RES TOP_{CL}

‘when the day of the ceremony of the millet arrived indeed’

129. **yě bé akpakpo** [1.05]

3PL collect threshing.flail

‘they picked up the flails’

130. **đè li xíyá** [1.32]

be millet leave.to.dry

‘to thresh the millet that was left to dry’

131. **bo yè bé akpakpo** [1.77]

CJss 3PL gather threshing.flail

‘and they picked up the threshing flails’

132. **kɔn ny’ayĩ** [0.86]

pour throw-ground

‘pouring libations on the ground’

133. **mε-ta** **mε-ta** [0.59]
 person-GEN.head person-GEN.head
 ‘to the ancestors, to the ancestors’¹³⁰
134. **’sisi** [0.26]
 co-wife
 ‘the first wife’
135. **é** **m̀** **ǹ** **dó** **́** **éné** [1.63]
 REL see thing hole RES DEM
 ‘who spied upon the one-armed girl through the peephole, that one!’
136. **bó** **ḍ̀** **mε** **ce** **lé** **m̀** [1.59]
 CJss say person POS₁ PL 1PL
 ‘and she said: my dear friends! to us’ [direct speech]
137. **é** **yá** **è** [2.0]
 CL₃ be.ready DEI
 ‘the millet is ready and waiting! Look!’ [direct speech]
138. **m̀** **ḍ̀** **li** **́** **ná** **só** **wε** **è** [1.67]
 1PL AUX millet DEF FUT thresh pFOC DEI
 ‘we will thresh the millet! here you are!’ [direct speech]
139. **mi** **wá** **f̂** **akpakpo** **mi-t̀n** **mi-t̀n** **bo**
 2PL come pick.up threshing.flail 2PL-GEN 2PL-GEN CJss
- nú** **m̀** **ná** **jé** **jí**
 CJ 1PL FUT fall LOC [2.03] [flash forward]
 ‘you pick up a threshing flail, each of you, each of you and let us start threshing’
140. **ỳkpó** **tówé** **ká** **nỳ** **av̀** **t̀n** **k̀** [0.42]
 young.girl POS₂ but throw cloth GEN neck
 ‘well, your young women threw her cloth around her neck’

¹³⁰ **mε** means ‘person’, but has also the meaning of ‘King of the earth’ or the ‘god **Sakpata**’ (Segurola and Rassinox 2000: 347). Fon people never mention his name.

141. **bo d̀ò tè** [2.61] [flash forward]
CJss be standing
'and proudly stood'
142. **b̀ò yè s̀ó ét̀on d̀okp̀ó s̀ d'ásá mé n'ĩ** [1.8]
CJds 3PL take GEN one DEF put.leg LOC give.3SG
'and they put a threshing flail at her feet'
143. **b̀ò m̀e d̀è lé b'ĩ f̀o** [1.93]
CJds person SPEC PL all pick.up
'and all the other people picked up'
144. **akpakpo** [1.68]
threshing flail
'a threshing flail'
145. **b̀ò xwé-gán l̀s s̀ó akpakpo** [0.98]
CJds house-GEN.chief also lift threshing flail
'and the chief of the family also took a threshing flail'
- [Audience:]
146. **a sé à gb̀e t̀on lé wi t̀on**
2SG understand Q comrade GEN PL honour GEN

d̀ò nà k̀ón wé 'né
AUX IRM remove pFOC DEI
'you mean that all his friends knew he would be dishonoured, is that so?'
147. **éne**
DEI
'that is it!'
148. **yě bì k̀ó tuun d̀ò wi**
3PL QF OSM know CP honour
'They all already knew for sure that their chief'
149. **wi t̀on d̀ò nà k̀ón wè** [0.91]
honour GEN AUX IRM remove pFOC
'his name would be dishonoured'

P 17

150. **é cí m̀̀ é ́** [2.24] [tail-head]
CL₃ stay thus RES TOP_{CL}
‘when that was the present state of affairs’
151. **ỳ̀kpó tówé ś ́** [1.5]
young.girl POS₂ lift TOP_{CL}
‘when your young woman took’
152. **akpakpo ɔ’álo t̀̀n** [0.7]
threshing.flail have.hand GEN
‘the threshing flail in her hand’
153. **’ɔ̀sì ́ wú** [1.4]
right DEF GEN.body
‘in her right hand’¹³¹
154. **bo x̀̀ avo ś nyì gbè sín** [1.21]
CJss beat cloth take throw pour ORIG
‘and she flung her cloth, throwing it’
155. **amyó ́ jí** [1.7]
left DEF LOC
‘over her left shoulder’
156. **bo dó han nɛ** [2.53] [cliff hanger]
CJss apply song DEM
‘and started to sing the following song’

P 18 [Song]

157. **é nyí mi to mɛ l’alɔ-gan yaya**
CL₃ say 1PL country LOC WISH-hand-GEN.iron freely
- na so li b’ɛ ná mé**
FUT thresh millet CJds.CL₃ FUT be.fine
‘as the saying goes in our country may the metal bracelet without thinking
thresh the millet and it will be crushed to powder’

¹³¹ The right hand means ‘wise’, and the left hand means ‘powerful’.

158. **é nyí mi to mɛ**
 CL₃ say 1PL country LOC
 ‘as the saying goes in our country’
159. **alɔ-gan kɛdʒé ná so li b’ɛ ná mé**
 hand-GEN.iron only FUT thresh millet CJs.CL₃ FUT be.fine
 ‘only the metal bracelet will thresh the millet and it will be crushed to powder’
160. **é nyí’mi-lɛ-tɔn lé.alɔ-gan yaya na**
 CL₃ say-LOG-self-GEN WISH.hand-GEN.iron freely FUT

só li b’ɛ ná mé
 thresh millet CJs.CL₃ FUT be.fine
 ‘as the saying goes back home may the metal bracelet thresh the millet without thinking and it will be crushed to powder’
161. **é nyí mi to mɛ**
 CL₃ say 1PL country LOC
 ‘as the saying goes in our country’
162. **alɔ-gan kɛdʒé ná so li b’ɛ ná mé**
 hand-GEN.iron only FUT thresh millet CJs.CL₃ FUT be.fine
 ‘only the metal bracelet will thresh the millet and it will be crushed to powder’
163. **xó è hwi mi**
 word REL ANA₂ 1PL
 ‘the words that you, we’
164. **nó dʒó lé dʒokpó ná hwe dʒ’é mɛ ǎ**
 RM say CP one FUT fail be.CL₃ LOC NEG
 ‘say again and again, that one will not fail at all’
165. **é nyí mi to mɛ**
 3SG say 1PL country LOC
 ‘as the saying goes in our country’
166. **alɔ-gan yàyá ná só li b’ɛ ná mé**
 hand-GEN.iron freely FUT thresh millet CJs.CL₃ FUT be.fine
 ‘the mental bracelet will thresh the millet without thinking and it will be crushed to powder’

167. **éne** [2.32]

DEI

‘that is it!’

P 19 [Audience: 168, 169]

168. **é d̥ò m̀ bó jì han káká é ́**

CL₃ say thus CJss produce song until RES TOP_{CL}

‘when she had sung for a long time’

169. **yè só li b̀ li mé** [1.18]

3PL thresh millet CJds millet be.fine

‘they threshed the millet and it was crushed to powder’

170. **al̥ d̥ò ganjí e só m̀** [2.2]

hand be perfect CL₃ take see

‘the hand was perfect, one saw’

[Audience: 171, 172, 173]

171. **al̥ t̥n̥ ’nè** [0.35]

hand GEN DEM_R

‘that hand of hers’

172. **d̥è hwé dó d̥è wú ǎ** [1.68]

SPEC fail apply be body NEG

‘the one that missed’

173. **m̥ é d̥ò xó é m̀ winnyá-’né** [0]

person CL₃ say word CL₃ see shame-DEI

‘the person who slandered, shame on her!’

174. **é m̀ winnyá-’né** [1.61]

CL₃ see shame-DEI

‘shame on her!’

[Audience:]

175. **éné ́ wá yí-’né**

DEI DEF shame get-DEI

‘there you are! shame on her!’

Appendix 3: Graphical representation Abomey 4

Pause nr	Narrative element	Rhetorical element	Graphical representation
p001			<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Abomey 4, Length of the pauses</p> <p>paragrag number and pause umber</p> <p>0,00 2,00 4,00</p> <p>(p), Length of the pause</p> </div>
p002			
p003			
p004		FB	
p005		CP	
p006			
p007			
p008			
p009			
p010			
p011			
p012			
p013			
p014	end of paragraph 1	CH	
p015			
p016		FF 042	
p017			
p018		FF	
p019	end of paragraph 2	TH	
p020			
p021	peak		
p022	end of paragraph 3	TH	
p023			
p024		Agent B	
p025			
p026			
p027	end of paragraph 4	TH	
p028			
p029			
p030			

Pause nr	Narrative element	Rhetorical element	Graphical representation
p031	end of paragraph 5	TH	<p style="text-align: center;">Abomey 4 Length of the pause (cont)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Paragraph number and pause number</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0,00 5,00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(p), Length of the pause</p>
p032			
p033			
p034	end of paragraph 6	CH	
p035	CP paragraph		
p036		FF	
p037			
p038	end of paragraph 7	FF	
p039			
p040		FB	
p041		FB	
p042		topic	
p043			
p044			
p045			
p046		CH	
p047		CH	
p048		CH	
p049	end of paragraph 8	CH	
p050		FF	
p051			
p052			
p053			
p054			
p055	end of paragraph 9		
p056			
p057		FF	
p058		FF	
p059			
p060		FF	

Pause nr	Narrative element	Rhetorical element	Graphical representation																																																																																													
p061			<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Abomey 4, Length of the pause</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Data for Abomey 4, Length of the pause</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Paragraph</th> <th>Pause nr</th> <th>Length of the Pause (p)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>10</td><td>p061</td><td>0.8</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>p062</td><td>0.8</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>p063</td><td>2.5</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>p064</td><td>0.8</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>p065</td><td>1.8</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>p066</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>p067</td><td>1.5</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>p068</td><td>2.2</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>p069</td><td>1.8</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>p070</td><td>0.2</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>p071</td><td>1.5</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>p072</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>p073</td><td>0.8</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>p074</td><td>0.8</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>p075</td><td>1.5</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>p076</td><td>1.5</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>p077</td><td>0.2</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>p078</td><td>0.3</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>p079</td><td>1.5</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p080</td><td>2.5</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p081</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p082</td><td>1.2</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p083</td><td>1.5</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p084</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p085</td><td>1.2</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p086</td><td>0.2</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p087</td><td>2.5</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p088</td><td>1.5</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p089</td><td>2.0</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>p090</td><td>0.2</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>(p), Length of the Puase</p> </div>	Paragraph	Pause nr	Length of the Pause (p)	10	p061	0.8	10	p062	0.8	10	p063	2.5	10	p064	0.8	10	p065	1.8	10	p066	0.5	10	p067	1.5	10	p068	2.2	10	p069	1.8	10	p070	0.2	11	p071	1.5	11	p072	0.5	11	p073	0.8	11	p074	0.8	11	p075	1.5	11	p076	1.5	11	p077	0.2	11	p078	0.3	11	p079	1.5	12	p080	2.5	12	p081	0.5	12	p082	1.2	12	p083	1.5	12	p084	0.5	12	p085	1.2	12	p086	0.2	12	p087	2.5	12	p088	1.5	12	p089	2.0	12	p090	0.2
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Pause nr	Narrative element	Rhetorical element	Graphical representation
p091			<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Abomey 4 Length of the pause (cont)</p> <p>13</p> <p>Paragraph number and Pause number</p> <p>0,00 1,00 2,00 3,00</p> <p>(p), Length of the pauses</p> </div>
p092			
p093			
p094		FF	
p095		FF	
p096			
p097		FF	
p098			
p099			
p100	end of paragraph 13	CH	
p101	TH statement	TH	
p102	Agent A, god Sun		
p103		FFgod Sun	
p104		FF	
p105	end of paragraph 14	TH	
p106			
p107	start of denouement		
p108			
p109			
p110			
p111			
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p114		BN	
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Pause nr	Narrative element	Rhetorical element	Graphical representation
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p122	audience		
p123	end of paragraph 15		
p124			
p125	audience		
p126			
p127		[= R 124]	
p128		CH	
p129			
p130			
p131		[= R 129]	
p132			
p133			
p134			
p135			
p136		Agent B DS	
p137		DS	
p138		DS	
p139		DS FF	
p140			
p141		FF	
p142			
p143			
p144			
p145			
p146	audience		
p147			
p148			
p149	end of paragraph 16	TH	
p150	TH statement	TH	

Pause nr	Narrative element	Rhetorical element	Graphical representation																																																
p151			<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Abomey 4 Length of the pauses (cont)</p> <table border="1" style="display: none;"> <caption>Data for Abomey 4 Length of the pauses (cont)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Paragraph</th> <th>Length of pause (s)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>p151</td><td>1.5</td></tr> <tr><td>p152</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>p153</td><td>1.5</td></tr> <tr><td>p154</td><td>1.2</td></tr> <tr><td>p155</td><td>1.8</td></tr> <tr><td>p156</td><td>2.5</td></tr> <tr><td>p157</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>p158</td><td>0.8</td></tr> <tr><td>p159</td><td>1.0</td></tr> <tr><td>p160</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>p161</td><td>0.8</td></tr> <tr><td>p162</td><td>0.8</td></tr> <tr><td>p163</td><td>0.8</td></tr> <tr><td>p164</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>p165</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>p166</td><td>1.8</td></tr> <tr><td>p167</td><td>2.2</td></tr> <tr><td>p168</td><td>0.1</td></tr> <tr><td>p169</td><td>1.2</td></tr> <tr><td>p170</td><td>2.2</td></tr> <tr><td>p171</td><td>0.5</td></tr> <tr><td>p172</td><td>1.8</td></tr> <tr><td>p173</td><td>0.1</td></tr> </tbody> </table> </div>	Paragraph	Length of pause (s)	p151	1.5	p152	0.5	p153	1.5	p154	1.2	p155	1.8	p156	2.5	p157	0.5	p158	0.8	p159	1.0	p160	0.5	p161	0.8	p162	0.8	p163	0.8	p164	0.5	p165	0.5	p166	1.8	p167	2.2	p168	0.1	p169	1.2	p170	2.2	p171	0.5	p172	1.8	p173	0.1
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Legend:

- CH : cliff hanger
- FB : flashback
- FF : flash forward
- TH : topic

Samenvatting

Het doel van deze publicatie is de beschrijving en analyse van de performance van de vertellers. In de jaren 1975 tot 1977 heb ik een corpus van 37 Fongbe verhalen verzameld in drie dorpen in het Zuiden van Benin. Ik heb de verhalen opgenomen op audiocassettes. Ik heb transcripties en Franse vertalingen in Benin gemaakt, in 1976 en 1977. Later heb ik de geluidsbanden gedigitaliseerd voor een diepgaande analyse.

De beschrijving en analyse gaat uit van een aantal verschillende invalshoeken. De invalshoek voor de verschillende analyses is dat wat je hoort in de opnames: de zinnestelsels en de pauzes er tussenin en het opvallende voorkomen van bepaalde partikels en deiktische markers.

Dit boek begint met een beschrijving van de instituties in het koninkrijk **Danxomè** dat rond 1625 werd gesticht. In het begin van de 19^e eeuw ontwikkelt het land zich tot een theocratie en een militaire staat. De complexe georganiseerde hiërarchie wordt gekenmerkt door de grote invloed van de **vodun** priesters en de zieners. De belangrijkste bron van inkomsten is mensenhandel; de slaven werden verkregen door rooftochten in de aangrenzende streken en door aankopen uit het noorden. Het koninkrijk wordt in 1894 Frans grondgebied. De verhalen van mijn corpus zijn geworteld in het vroegere koninkrijk. De hiërarchische structuur van de ‘chef’, de **vodun**-priester en de ziener vigeert nog altijd in de dorpen in 1976.

Vervolgens beschrijf ik de setting van de performance. Vertellers zijn ‘performance’ kunstenaars. Zij treden op binnen de compound van de clan. De sessies zijn overal vrijwel gelijk: de performer zit voor het publiek dat in een halve cirkel is gaan zitten. De sessies maken geen deel uit van een ceremonie. De inhoud van de verhalen heeft als doel de kinderen moraal bij te brengen. De verhalen worden **hwènùxó** ‘woorden uit het verleden’ genoemd. In tegenstelling tot eerder gepubliceerde corpora, zijn mijn performers voor het merendeel vrouw. Geen van de performers kan lezen noch schrijven; een uitzondering zijn twee performers in Ayou die een grote reputatie hebben. Deze mannen hebben ook een pharmacopee geschreven in het Frans. De performance van de oudere performers is zeer geperfectioneerd en laat een jarenlange ervaring zien.

Het publiek heeft een interactieve rol. Soms vraagt de performer aan het publiek of dat instemt met het verhaal. Maar het kan ook gebeuren dat het publiek intervenieert met lachen en juichen om zijn waardering te tonen, dan wel dat het kreten van afschuw slaakt.

Ik heb de verhalen geanalyseerd aan de hand van zeven verhalen in mijn corpus die min of meer gelijk zijn, hoewel verteld door verschillende performers in verschillende dorpen. Deze verhalen hebben dezelfde hoofdfiguur en agenten, maar

een onderling verschillend plot. Soms ook komen dezelfde agenten voor in verschillende verhalen die geen enkele overeenkomst hebben. Dit leidt tot de veronderstelling dat de performers een grote mate van vrijheid hebben om hun performance te improviseren.

Allereerst komt de inhoud van de verhalen aan de orde. De verhalen hebben een centrale figuur die het probleem in het verhaal oplost. Hij is de spil waar het verhaal om draait en bezit magische of bovennatuurlijke krachten. Soms is hij een gebruiksvoorwerp, zoals een sauspot, soms is hij een fictief schepsel of de personificatie van een **vodun**, een van de goden van de Fon. Deze figuur is het enige karakter in het verhaal.

In de verhalen treden ook altijd twee agenten op met eigenschappen die lijken op de twee zijden van een munt. Het tweetal kan bestaan uit twee bijvrouwen of twee vrienden, maar ook uit de wees en de koning of de jager en de koning. De ene agent verpersoonlijkt goedheid, de andere agent belichaamt slechtheid. Ik heb gekozen voor het woord agenten, omdat zij handelen als marionetten, zij illustreren slechts de twee kanten van de plot van het verhaal. Ze hebben geen naam noch gezicht, ze hebben wel een herkenbare functie. Zo stellen ze vaak machtige figuren voor als goden en koningen. Het kunnen echter ook gewone mensen uit het Fon dorp zijn als de smid of de eerste vrouw. Goden kunnen de gedaante aannemen van mensen of dieren, en mensen kunnen veranderen in dieren en omgekeerd. Maar mensen veranderen nooit in goden. De agenten en hun daden geven inzicht in het Fon concept van macht en machtsrelaties.

Het thema van de verhalen is het menselijk gedrag, in termen van deugden en taboes. Het thema wordt neergezet in termen van de ziener **bokónḽ**, het orakel **Fa** en **Sé**, de persoonlijke ‘beschermgeest’. Er zijn twee soorten verhalen: dramatische en komische. De hoofdpersoon in de dramatische verhalen is vaak een god die tijdelijk in een voorwerp huist. De hoofdpersoon in de komische verhalen is vaak de bedrieger **Yḽgbó**. Het is voor de Fon gebruikelijk om mensen en goden niet bij hun naam noemen. Zo noemen ze evenmin de naam van de hoofdpersoon. In plaats daarvan omschrijven ze vaak diens opvallende trekken. Performers kiezen zelf of ze een lied door de hoofdpersoon toevoegen aan de ontknoping, waarin deze in formele taal en op plechtige toon de moraal geeft.

Verhalen hebben een simpel kader als contour. Het begin introduceert de agenten en het thema; daarna volgt de presentatie van de hoofdpersoon (soms in een flash back), waarna het tot een climax komt waarin de hoofdpersoon een rol speelt. Daarna neemt de agent die slachtoffer is actie, schakelt de hoofdpersoon in die de ontknoping in gang zet, waarna de schuldige wordt gestraft. De verhalen hebben geen rigide voorgeschreven verhaallijn. **Hwè̀nù̀xó** is een inheems genre met een

embryonale verhaallijn. De verhalen hebben een sterk religieuze inslag, waardoor ze in het genre van de mythe vallen.

Ik heb ook de structuur van het narratieve discours geanalyseerd. De performers structuren hun discours hoorbaar. Daarom heb ik de lengte van de gesproken zinnestelsels en de lengte van de pauzes ertussen in gemeten. De statistische analyses laten een constante spreeknelheid zien, die slechts wordt doorbroken bij retorische figuren en liedjes. Echter, het is opvallend dat de lengte van de pauzes varieert. Het kenmerk van het discours is het patroon van de pauzes waarin de pauzes steeds langer worden en functioneren als inhoud markers. De overgang naar de nieuwe paragraaf is gemarkeerd door een relatief lange pauze. Soms begint de nieuwe paragraaf met een specifieke zinsopener, en het zinnestelsel eindigt in de meeste gevallen met het bepaalde slotpartikel *ǎ*.

Het Fongbe werkwoord kent geen tijden, maar voegt verbale prefixen aan het werkwoord toe om aspect en stemming aan te geven. Het gebruik van deze verbale prefixen verschilt van het Fongbe zoals gesproken in het urbane Cotonou. Er is sprake van grammaticalisatie in de tekst van de verhalen. Ook worden bepaalde constructies op bepaalde vaste plaatsen in het discours gebruikt, bijvoorbeeld om het thema te verwoorden. De definitieve marker *ǎ* volgt de hoofdfiguur door het verhaal. Dit partikel heeft een multifunctioneel gebruik: het wordt gebruikt om TOEN-zinnen af te sluiten, en is een definitieve marker die volgt op het substantivum van de centrale figuur en diens paraferalia. Mijn analyse eindigt met een beschrijving van de gebruikte stijlfiguren.

Ten slotte, beschrijf ik het wezen van de performance en beantwoord ik de vraag hoe de performer de performance creëert. De meest adequate beschrijving van de performance is die van de ‘Storyboard’ techniek. Wanneer de performer heeft besloten welk verhaal zij gaat ‘doen’, kiest ze de hoofdpersoon en de agenten. Hierna maakt ze mentaal een plaatje voor elke stap in het verhaal. Zij hanteert een patroon van pauzes en een aantal grammaticale instrumenten als de inhoud markers die de stijlfiguren en de paragraafgrenzen aangeven. Ze gebruikt grammaticale en lexicale markers om de rol van de hoofdpersoon en de agenten te onderstrepen, en ze gebruikt aspecten en stemming om de acties te kleuren. Het staat de performer vrij om herhalingen toe te passen of een uitweiding te doen voordat ze overgaat tot de ontknoping. De *hwènùxó* is een combinatie van een strak kader voor het taalgebruik dat veel ruimte laat voor improvisatie.

Curriculum Vitae

Marjolijn Aalders Groot was born in Amsterdam on 13 February 1947. After attending the 'Christelijk Lyceum, Moreelsestraat' in Amsterdam ('Dutch gymnasium A'), she studied French Literature and Linguistics at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1964 (VU). After obtaining her 'kandidaats' degree, she studied Discourse Studies at Amsterdam University (UVA). She obtained her 'doctoraal' degree in 1975 with a study on Kummer's approach of text grammar. She attended a course on field linguistics (VU-SIL) before leaving for West Africa. She was admitted as a Ph.D.-candidate to the Graduate School of Humanities of Leiden University in 2010.

She started her career as manager logistics of the Sahel Emergency Aid, part of the World Food Programme (FAO-UN) in Cotonou, Benin in 1975. She was FAO-UNDP representative at the 'Integrated Rural Development in West Africa' Conferences in Lomé, Togo (1975 - 1977). During her stay in Benin, she learned Fongbe to prepare for a fieldwork that aimed at collecting Fongbe Verbal Art. After a three years' stay in Benin, she went to Haiti where she lived in Cap Haitien and Port-au-Prince during two years.

She was an assistant with the 'Recall and political attitudes'-research project of the Institute of Discourse Studies at Amsterdam University in 1981. She started working as a consultant in the field of marketing communication in 1982. Later she was interim-manager of a number of projects. In 1994, she founded Groot Consultants Ltd., and from 2001 to 2006, she was partner of ICM, Institute for Communication and Management.

Over the years, she attended several courses in the field of management, economics and finance. She is a qualified trainer in NLP (Auchterarder, Perthshire and London, U.K.).

She was a member of the city council of her hometown and a member of the national board for one of the leading political parties from 2001 to 2003

Since 1967, she has been board member of a number of foundations, amongst which the Board of the Foundation Dr. Abraham Kuyperfonds since 1991. In 2009, she founded the Verbal Art Foundation that she chairs. The foundation aims at the collection and preservation of endangered cultural heritage.

Stellingen bij het proefschrift

‘Verbal art from the Fon of Benin’

Door: Marjolijn Aalders Grool

1. One of the main features of the performance of Fongbe verbal art is the careful timing of speech that shows a pattern of pauses, which segments the content of the story into meaningful chunks.
2. One of the main features of Fongbe narrative discourse is the extensive use of background information marked by the multifunctional definite particle **ɔ**.
3. The performer mentally uses a storyboard to construct the narrative. The performer is free to pick properties from the storyboard and subsequently create a panel for each of the steps in the story.
4. The performance of a story is not a reproduction of a story recalled from memory. The performer has the freedom to improvise within the compliant borders of the framework of the Fongbe **hwènùxó**.
5. The eloquence of the performers of verbal art is due to their powerful oratorical experience. Their rhetorical abilities are refined, and more expert than those of so-called highly educated people when it comes to style.
6. Lefebvre’s assumption that Fongbe is one of the West African substratum languages of Haitian Creole is questionable considering the structure of polar clauses, yes/no questions and WH-questions.
(Lefebvre, Claire. 1998. *Creole genesis and the acquisition of grammar. The cause of the Haitian Creole*. New York, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)
7. A real king or queen always uses spokespersons. The protocol of the former Kingdom of **Danxomè** required two ministers as a spokesperson: the powerful **mewu** ‘the king’s linguist’ was the king’s spokesperson who sat on the king’s left side. On the other hand, the **migàn** who sat on the king’s right side was the spokesperson of the commoners who were not allowed to address the king.
8. False descriptions have a persistent life, for many authors copy descriptions without second thoughts. An example is the epithet **adɔnɔ** ‘owner of the spider’s web’. One of the components is either **adɔ** ‘spider’s web’ or **ad** ‘entrails’. The word **adɔnɔ**

that occurs in my corpus has middle tones. Fongbe tonality maintains low tones, but the raising tone glides to a higher tone that even influences the low **nɔ̃**. There is no doubt that 'spider's web' is the correct translation. Since the missionaries the word is misinterpreted as 'glutton'. That continues until today.

(Aalders Groot, Marjolijn. 2013. *Verbal Art from the Fon of Benin, Stories I*, Ayou 3, 37 - 55; Pères Segurola, Basilio and Jean Rassinoux. 2000. *Dictionnaire Fon - Français*, 9. Cotonou: Société des Missions Africaines.)

9. Basic research is necessary to support or empower applied and comparative researches that are otherwise foredoomed to fail having neither criteria nor references.
10. Mastering several foreign languages is a major factor in the education of youth, for it develops awareness of the variety of cultures and may temper feelings of xenophobia.
11. Graham Green set the scene of his book 'The Comedians' in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Due to circumstances the picture of the book was made in Cotonou, Benin. The beggars in the novel 'make sounds' or 'babble half articulated phrases'. But an extra disclosed that the shooting took place in Cotonou, loudly screaming the Fongbe **Yovo** instead of the appropriate Haitian Creole **Blanc**.
(Greene, Graham. 1967. *The Comedians*, p. 166 and p. 193. Harmondsworth: Penguin.)