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**A sociolinguistic study of an Ewe-based youth language of Aflao, Ghana**  
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## CHAPTER FOUR

### SEMANTIC MANIPULATIONS AND SPEAKER ETYMOLOGIES OF ADZAGBE VOCABULARY

#### 4.1 Introduction

Youth languages have also been studied as regards semantic manipulations embedded in them. Kiessling and Mous (2004:324) mention a wide range of semantic manipulations that youth languages display, namely, “all kinds of normal semantic processes such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche... euphemism, dysphemism are applied, but to the extreme.” The list provided by Kiessling and Mous (2004) shows that the study of semantic extensions in youth languages is a huge enterprise which encompasses many semantic manipulations and changes.

This chapter presents semantic manipulations in Adzagbe vocabulary and speaker etymologies of Adzagbe idiomatic expressions as the second part of the answer to the first research question, which seeks to reveal what goes into the creation of Adzagbe. A number of lexical items in the Adzagbe Lexicon have undergone semantic changes from their original attestations, whether or not they are from the base Ewe, to their current attestations in Adzagbe. These changes are conscious and deliberate creations from Adzagbe speakers. In this thesis, six semantic manipulations have been identified from the Adzagbe-Ewe Library 2021. These manipulations are metaphor, metonymy, onomastic synecdoche, euphemism, pejoration and narrowing.

#### 4.2 Metaphor

Metaphorical extensions are a major semantic process in Adzagbe as they are in many youth languages in Africa. An example of a metaphor in Khartoum youth language given by Mugaddam (2009) is *hakkar* which originally means *old car*. *Hakkar* has acquired the metaphorical meaning of *old and unattractive woman*. It follows, therefore, that one can

be said to be driving a *hakkar* in Khartoum youth language to mean that one is actually in a relationship with an ugly old woman. Of course, it takes some knowledge of this metaphor to decode the example accurately. One needs a passport to the community of Khartoum youth language, so to speak, to be able to decode this metaphor. We can find secrecy and fun in this metaphor, as it is with metaphorical language use in general, showing that sometimes word creation is just a game of fun among the youth.

In Adzagbe, an original word, either Ewe or foreign, is given a metaphorical meaning. According to Sekyi-Baidoo (2002:320), “metaphorical uses of words abound in everyday speech. Whereas some of such uses are contextual, others come to stay”. Lakoff and Johnson (2003:1) argue that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language use but also in thought and action”. Metaphorical extensions are, therefore, very popular and are a part of Adzagbe everyday life. Adzagbe metaphorical manipulations of words from Ewe or foreign sources are usually playful and provocative, especially that the metaphors are about topics such as sex and morally objectionable behaviour. **Table 4.1** presents some of these metaphors in Adzagbe.

**Table 4. 1: Some Adzagbe metaphors**

Word	Source language	Old meaning	New meaning
88. bo/ebo	Ewe	farm bed	girlfriend
89. payi	Twi	Explode	to be angry

**Table 4.1** shows some Adzagbe vocabulary that have undergone metaphorical extensions from their original attestations to their present states in Adzagbe. Example 88 *bo/ebo* is an Ewe noun which means *bed of crops*. The source of this metaphor could be a similar metaphorical expression in French, which is *mon petit jardin* ‘lit. my little garden’ which

corresponds with Adzagbe's *ebo* 'lit. bed of crops'. Like in French, the term means *girlfriend* in Adzagbe. According to one Adzagbe male speaker:

Mimbo-wo le     abe   ebo wo-da.gble   ɔe   dzi ene,  
girll-PL     VLOC as   bed 3PL-farm   PREP top as  
  
ye.ta mí-yɔ-na     wo be     ebo.  
CONJ 1PL-call-HAB 3PL COMP bed

'Girlfriends are like a bed of crops under cultivation. That is why we call them *ebo* 'bed of crops'' (a 22-year-old male, Adzagbe Notes, February 2020)

From this, it is obvious that *ebo* 'girlfriend', used synonymously with *mimbo* 'girlfriend', derived from the English word *bimbo*, in Adzagbe is a metaphorical rendition of *ebo* 'bed of crops' in Ewe. We note similar metaphorical use in *payi* 'explode' from Twi *pae* 'explode' and *to get angry* in Adzagbe.

### 4.3 Metonymy

Besides metaphor, as it is in many youth languages across the African continent, Adzagbe speakers also employ metonymy in creating new words. Metonymy concerns the substitution of one thing for another to which it is closely linked. For example, a gun can be used in place of soldiers because the two are closely linked. Mugaddam (2009) provides some interesting examples of metonymy in the youth language of Khartoum. Some of these are *laban* 'milk', *hawe* 'storms' and *mustahami* 'having had a shower'. Viewed from the spectacles of metonymy, *laban* now means 'breasts of girls', *hawe* means 'problems' and *inustahami* means 'handsome'. Metonymically, we can see the connection between milk and breast, storms and problems, and washing down and being handsome. **Table 4.2** presents examples of metonymy in the Adzagbe Lexicon.

**Table 4. 2: Metonymy in Adzagbe**

Word	Source language	Meaning
90. vẽ /evẽ	vagina (English)	girl
91. boto	beauté (French)	girl

The first item on **Table 4.2** is *vẽ* with its prothetic version *evẽ*, originating from the English word *vagina*, with its metonymical new meaning of *girl* in Adzagbe. The second item is *boto* from the French word *beauté* ‘beauty’, with its metonymical link to *girl* in Adzagbe, making *vẽ* and *boto* synonyms in Adzagbe.

#### 4.4 Onomastic synecdoche

Onomastic synecdoche is a widely used word-creation process in youth languages. In onomastic synecdoche, proper names are reduced to denote concepts. Just as in synecdoche where a part represents a whole, so is it in onomastic synecdoche that someone’s name, which is seen as a part of that person, is used to represent a concept that is attached to him or her. For example, when someone is referred to as *Rawlings* in Ghana (after a former president of Ghana), it means the person is courageous and fearless, concepts Jerry John Rawlings has come to represent all over Ghana. Another example is the name *John*, which is a very popular name in Ghana; but an individual can also be called a *John*, meaning he is an idiot. How this came about in Ghana is difficult to fathom. Whatever the origin of *John* denoting foolish in Ghana, it is a perfect example of onomastic synecdoche. An example of onomastic synecdoche in the youth language of Khartoum given by Mugaddam (2009) is *sharrhabeel* coined after a famous Sudanese singer. The first syllable of the name is similar to the Arabic word *sherra* which means spread something in the sun. From this name, Khartoum youth derive the meaning to keep someone waiting for a long time. Adzagbe also possesses some onomastic synecdoches, four of which are presented on **Table 4.3**.

**Table 4. 3: Some onomastic synecdoche in Adzagbe**

Word	Source	Meaning
92. axɔlu	Axɔlu (Ewe personal name)	fool
93. aloba	Abalo (Ewe personal name)	boy, young man
94. dzɔn	John (English personal name)	fool
95. otofista	Otto Pfister (German personal name)	to dress and expose one's buttocks

Example 92 on **Table 4.3** is the onomastic synecdoche *axɔlu*, which comes from a popular Ewe name *Axɔlu*. According to Ewe tradition, *Axɔlu* is a name given to a male child whose parents have remained childless and sought help to bear a child from traditional voodoo priests. A female child of this same process is called *Axɔlusi* ‘female *Axɔlu*’. In Adzagbe, *axɔlu* means ‘foolish person’. Adzagbe speakers say that this current attestation is reached in Adzagbe on the grounds that an *Axɔlu* is a spirit child who is possessed and cannot think and act for themselves except what has been determined for him by the gods to do and speak, making *Axɔlu* a remote-controlled person, an idiot.

Following *axɔlu* is *aloba*, whose origin is an interesting one. *Abalo* is a popular male name in neighboring Lomé, Togo, that Ghana’s Aflao shares border with. This name in particular became very popular as it was found in many textbooks for primary schools in Togo. Some parents in Aflao interested in French education send their children across the border into Lomé to school. On the other hand, some parents in Lomé interested in English education, send their children across the border to Aflao to school. This is normal between the people of Lomé and Aflao even today. The name *Abalo* is, therefore, well-known among the people of Aflao. It entered Adzagbe by metathesis of the syllables; hence, *Abalo* becoming *aloba*, meaning ‘boyfriend’ or ‘young man’ in Adzagbe. The next

onomastic synecdoche is *dzɔn*, originating from the name *John* which we have already discussed. *Dzɔn* means ‘foolish person’ in Adzagbe. The final item is *otofista* after a German football coach called Otto Pfister (see Section 4.8, example 115 for full etymology).

#### 4.5 Euphemism

Adzagbe speakers also employ euphemism, a more pleasant way of presenting something that is rather harsh or unacceptable. Fu Yindiz (2021) points out that euphemism is common in youth languages as regards sensitive topics like death, and that the youth will resort to euphemisms to convey such messages. Examples of euphemisms in Adzagbe concern topics like sex, death and Adzagbe subversive culture. **Table 4.4** presents some of these euphemisms.

**Table 4. 4: Some euphemisms in Adzagbe**

Word	Source Language	Meaning
96. hayi high	high (English)	kill someone
97. dɔwɔnu tool	Ewe	marijuana
98. ɖu alò eat chewing.stick	Ewe	have sex
99. da fu ɖi put bone down	Ewe	die
100. eyi tsitsi gbla cutlass blunt IDEO	Ewe	foolish/naïve person

Example 96 is *hayi* from the English word *high* which means *kill* in Adzagbe. Adzagbe speakers created this from their belief that when one dies, he or she goes to heaven, which

is *hayi* ‘high’ above us. Creating *hayi* obviously euphemises the seriousness that goes with killing someone. Example 97 is *dɔ-wɔ-nu* ‘lit. work-do-thing’, an Ewe word that means ‘tool’, but means ‘marijuana’ in Adzagbe. The Euphemism here is clear. However, for a full speaker etymology of *dɔwɔnu*, see Section 4.8, Example 110 of this chapter. Example 98 means *have sex* in Adzagbe. *Du alo* is based on Ewe and literally means ‘chew stick’. This example euphemises sex act, a phenomenon that is unspeakable and unprintable in Ewe itself, in that the very word used to depict sex act *mɔ* ‘have sex’ in Ewe is always replaced with *dɔ* ‘sleep’, which is a euphemism itself (Amenorvi and Grumah, 2020). It is no wonder then that Adzagbe has a euphemism for sex. Example 95 *da fu qi* (see Section 4.8, Example 108, for full etymology) is also Ewe-based and literally means *put bone down* – it means *to die* in Adzagbe.

The final example on **Table 4.4** is *eyi tsitsi gbla* from Ewe. This idiomatic expression comprises *eyi tsitsi* ‘lit. quenched cutlass’ and the ideophone *gbla*, the sound a blunt cutlass makes against a dry wood, according to Adzagbe speakers. *Eyi tsitsi gbla* means ‘foolish’ or ‘naïve person’ or ‘one who does not speak Adzagbe’ in Adzagbe. An instance of the last meaning is what we saw in the conversation at the beginning of the previous chapter. Denyo refers to Amenyo, a non-Adzagbe speaker they are trying to help cross the border, as *eyi tsitsi gbla* – Amenyo is ‘foolish’ or ‘naïve’ before these Adzagbe rogues because he cannot speak nor understand their conversation. Obviously, *eyi tsitsi gbla* euphemises the seriousness of referring to someone as foolish.

#### **4.6 Pejoration**

Another semantic process present in the Adzagbe Lexicon is pejoration, also known as deterioration or degeneration. Pejoration “occurs...as a result of the highlighting of the negative characteristic of the sense of the word.” (Sekyi-Baidoo 2002:318). As in the case of metaphors, the lexical items that have undergone pejoration in Adzagbe have their roots in Ewe or foreign materials. **Table 4.5** presents some of these.

**Table 4. 5: Some pejorations in Adzagbe**

Word	Source Language	Old meaning	New meaning
101. develo	English	develop	alcohol
102. agbãvi	Ewe	plate	gun
103. xɔnametɔ	Ewe	saviour	spoilt girl

Example 101 *develo* originates from the English verb *develop*. In Adzagbe, that meaning has degenerated to *alcohol*. On why Adzagbe speakers refer to alcohol as *develo* from the English word *develop*, one Adzagbe speaker says:

Ne è-xɔ so vi ɖe zã dɔwɔnu vi ɖe, è-dzo!  
 COND 2SG-receive local.gin small INDEF use tool small INDEF 2SG-go

Èdza develop zi ɖeka. È-dza feel fine ɲutɔ.  
 2SG-AUX time one 2SG-AUX very

Develo-e nye alcohol, è-tse sevo-a?  
 develop-FOC COP 2SG-see brain-Q

‘If you drink a little alcohol and smoke a small amount of marijuana, you’re gone! You will develop at once. You will feel very fine.’ Develo is alcohol. Do you see the point?

(Adzagbe Notes, April 2020)

It is obvious from the above comment that the mind-altering effects of drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana is the *development* Adzagbe speakers are referring to, a clear case of pejoration. Example 102 presents another word of Ewe origin, *agbãvi*, which means ‘plate’ in Ewe. In Adzagbe, *agbãvi* means ‘gun’, a clear deterioration in meaning, considering the danger a gun poses compared to a plate. The final example on **Table 4.5** is *xɔnametɔ* ‘saviour’ from Ewe origin. In Adzagbe, *xɔnametɔ* ‘saviour’ means a spoilt girl who does not say no to any man’s request of sex from her. This pejoration is likely built on a popular one used among the wider community of Aflao - *dɔmenyotɔ* ‘lit. a kind person’. When a girl is referred to pejoratively among the wider community as *dɔmenyotɔ* ‘lit. a kind person’, it means she is spoilt and does not say no to any man about sex. With *dɔmenyotɔ* in mind, Adzagbe speakers have created *xɔnametɔ* ‘saviour’ to mean *spoilt girl*.

#### **4.7 Narrowing**

Though not a very common semantic process in Adzagbe as metaphor and pejoration are, some Adzagbe vocabulary undergo the process of narrowing, defined by Sekyi-Baidoo (2002:313) as referring to a word or expression that no longer refers to the “totality of its original sense but only aspect of this totality”. Adzagbe also possesses some words whose new meanings refer to only aspects of the totality of their original meanings. **Table 4.6** presents three of these narrowed words.

**Table 4. 6: Some narrowings in Adzagbe**

<b>Word</b>	<b>Source Language</b>	<b>Old meaning</b>	<b>New meaning</b>
104. tuivua	voiture (French)	car	expensive car

105. vega	velo (French)	motorbike/bicycle	expensive motorbike
106. gankivi	gang (English)	gang	rogue

Example 104 presents the Adzagbe word *tuivua* which originates from the permutation of syllables of the French superordinate term *voiture* ‘car’, which refers to all types of automobile and wagons. In Adzagbe, however, *tuivua* is narrowed to only expensive cars. The same narrowing goes for the Adzagbe *vega*, created from the clipping and fusion of the French word *velo* ‘motorcycle or bicycle’ and the Ewe word *gasɔ* ‘bicycle’. The French word *velo* as a superordinate term refers to all types of motorcycles or bicycles. In Adzagbe, *vega* refers to only expensive motorcycles. Like *vega*, *gan̄kivi* is another case of narrowing, created from the English word *gang*, which is realised as *gan̄ki* in Adzagbe, and the Ewe diminutive suffix *-vi*, used in Adzagbe one of the ways it is employed in Ewe to mean ‘member of’, ‘part of’ or ‘belonging to’, making *gan̄kivi* ‘rogue’ a member of a gang. While *gang* refers to an organised group of criminals, *gan̄kivi* refers to a ‘rogue’ in Adzagbe, not a group of criminals as the original English word *gang* does.

#### 4.8 Some Adzagbe Speaker Etymologies

While etymologies have generally largely focused on words, Mailhammer (2007:3) argues that “in principle anything can be studied etymologically.” He continues that items that can be studied etymologically include an entire text. It means that lexical items as well as idiomatic expressions can be studied etymologically. Speaker etymology is very popular among Adzagbe speakers, especially for Adzagbe idiomatic expressions, which are almost all based on Ewe. Every idiomatic expression in Adzagbe is a deliberate creation with a unique etymology. As in the case of old words with new meanings in this thesis, Adzagbe idiomatic expressions espouse lucidness and provocativeness. According to Winer (1992:238-239), speaker etymology is “a popular but false hypothesis for a word

derivation, usually based on similarities of phonology on meaning between two or more words...” While Winer (1992) defines speaker etymology as *false*, the focus of Adzagbe speakers regarding their etymologies is not a question of falsehood or correctness but that of their intentions, some of which are creation of humour, wordplay, exaggerations, conscious artistic use of language and sometimes things an outsider cannot make sense of. Besides, Winer’s (1992) use of the word *false* for speaker etymology concerns the scientificity of a word’s etymology, not its correctness or wrongness. A popular aetiological story in Ghana to illustrate Winer’s (1992) point is about how the crab lost its head. The story is that the crab had been the wisest in his village until his close friend borrowed his head in order to win a very difficult case at the chief’s court only not to return the crab’s head, resulting in the crab’s headlessness, and subsequent lack of wisdom, making it walk sideways instead of forward. Of course, this is false scientifically but has its own good side of creativity, imagination, artistic use of language and moral education. Adzagbe speaker etymologies are their own aetiological stories, so to speak, in the manner of the crab’s story to drive home their intentions.

Observations about Adzagbe speakers as regards their speaker etymologies are that, they are very well aware of their own innovations and creativities and they relate them with joy and compete among themselves as to who has more knowledge about this or that word or idiomatic expression. Adzagbe speakers also have a collective memory of these etymologies; they are like living folk etymological dictionaries. If you consult a number of them about the story behind an idiomatic expression, you get similar answers. Rundblad and Kronenfeld (2000:229) argue that an important aspect of speaker etymology is how easily they “are understood...adopted and spread further” as they begin “as highly individual constructions that adhere and conform to some kind of collective reality”. Also, some speaker etymologies “only serve to explain the ...history of a word” where the “etymologisers are very cautious regarding the form and meaning of the words – in order to be able to hypothesise about the origin and the creation of the words” (Rundblad and

Kronenfeld, 2000:233). Adzagbe speaker etymologies are interesting, logical, popular and easy to understand. In them, it is easy to tell the connection between form and meaning of the words and expressions. Since all these etymologies are also identity-driven, it is crucial we know exactly the identity that the youth seek to project, which is at best a negative image from the point of view of the rest of society, both in Aflao and neighbouring towns such as Denu, Agbozume, Dzodze, Sogakorpe, Akatsi, Ho and across the border into Lomé. They are in effect saying by these etymologies, “We are what we are and that is the way it will be. We create our own words and idiomatic expressions and we know what goes into them and we can tell our own stories.” Let us turn our attention now to **Table 4.7** after which we discuss some of these speaker etymologies.

**Table 4. 7: Some Adzagbe speaker etymologies**

<b>Idiomatic expression</b>	<b>Source Language</b>	<b>Literal meaning</b>	<b>Adzagbe meaning</b>
107. da neku throw testicles	Ewe	throw testicles	have sex
108. da fu ɖi put bone down	Ewe	put bone down	die
109. wɔ alo-vi do arm-DIM	Ewe	do arm small	steal
110. zã do-wɔ-nu use work-do-thing	Ewe	use tool	smoke marijuana
111. gbevu madogodzi rogue without.underpants	Ewe	rogue who does not wear underpants	weak rogue, coward

112. meḍekuku gbevu I.beg rogue	Ewe	I beg rogue	weak rogue, coward
113. mpa ke le sky me father DEM VLOC POST	Ewe, English	father in the sky	God
114. za agbo na ame hit ram DAT person	Ewe	hit one with a ram	have sex
115. xɔ otofista receive otofista	Ewe	receive Oto Pfister	show one's buttocks
116. wɔ aɖi do poison	Ewe	do poison	woo a girl

The first item on **Table 4.7** is Example 107 *da neku*, are Ewe words which literally mean *throw testicles*, but means *have sex* from a male's perspective in Adzagbe. The expression *da neku* comprises the Lomégbé word *neku* 'testicles', known in Aflaogbe as *veku* or *voku*, and the Ewe verb *da* 'throw', resulting in the literal meaning *throw testicles*. This expression is born from a popular Ewe expression *da alime* 'lit. throw waist' used metaphorically to mean *have sex*. According to some Adzagbe speakers as regards the etymology of *da neku*:

Ne è brɔshin wɔ-m-a, dziɓla ko-e  
COND 2SG brushing do-PROG-TOP penis only-FOC

ge-na ɖe do-a me.  
enter-HAB PREP hole-DEF POST

Neku ya ɖeko wò-nɔ-a  
testicle as.for just 1SG-stay-HAB

dada-m kplaya kplaya.  
dangle-PROG IDEO IDEO

Ta ne è-da neku-a,  
CONJ COND 2SG-throw testicle-TOP

e-fia be è-wɔ brɔshin. È-fũ-a?  
3SG-mean COMP 2SG-do brushing 2SG-know-Q

È-tse mía me sevo-a?  
2SG-see 1PL POSS brain-Q

‘If you have sex, only the penis enters the hole. As for the testicles, they just dangle to and fro. That’s why if you *da neku* ‘lit. throw testicles’, it means you have sex. Do you understand? Can you see our brilliance?’ (A **28-year-old male**, Adzagbe Notes, June 4, 2020)

The foregoing, of course, is not a linguistic analysis but speaker etymology from “the horse’s own mouth”, the owners of the language. As Winer (1992) points out, speaker etymology can be popular and interesting. From the speaker etymology of *da neku* above, we can realise that such etymologies are born from conscious connections of words and bending them to achieve the goals of a language community such as Adzagbe’s. The question “Can you see our brilliance?” reveals the conscious efforts Adzagbe speakers put in to bring forth these etymologies. They are interesting in their own right and reveal the self-awareness and pride Adzagbe speakers have towards their language as a special code among themselves.

The second idiomatic expression on **Table 4.7** is Example 108 *da fu di*, created from Ewe and literally means *put bone down*. In Adzagbe, it means *die*. As to its etymology, some male Adzagbe speakers say the following:

Wò ɲuto è-fũ      be      ne è-bɔ      za,  
2SG very 2SG-know COMP COND 2SG-eat food

a-teɲu      a-bɔ      ɲɔkpekpe kple lã-wo      katã,  
SUBJV-can SUBJV-eat everything CONJ meat-PL all

gake efu-a      ya      tsi      anyi na-da  
CONJ bone-DEF as.for remain down SUBJV-put

ɔe      kplɔ dzi.  
PREP table POST

Ye.ta ne      ame      aɔe      so-a  
CONJ COND person INDEF die-TOP

ne      wo-dji      ame-a,  
COND 3PL-burry person-DEF

efu ko-e      tsi-na      anyi.  
bone only-FOC remain-HAB down.

Ame-a      da fu      dji.  
person-DEF put bone down

È-fũ-a?  
2SG-know-Q

‘You yourself can tell that if you eat, you can eat everything including the meat but only the bone remains, and you put it down on the table. It’s the same if someone dies, only the bone remains. The person has *da fu dji* ‘lit. put bone down’. You understand?’ (A 24-year-old male, *Adzagbe Notes*, June 7, 2020)

This is the speaker etymology behind the idiomatic expression *da fu dji*. Bones are left after eating; in effect, if death *eats* someone, only the person’s bones remain. We can see

the metaphorical connection between someone eating meat or fish and leaving the bones and death eating someone and leaving the person's skeleton behind.

Example 109 is *wɔ alɔvi* also of Ewe origin. *Wɔ alɔvi* literally means *do arm small* or *make your arm small*. In Adzagbe, it means *to steal*, particularly *to pickpocket*. According to a male Adzagbe speaker:

Hafi n-a-xɔ gotu ne mɔfɔ aɖe-a,  
before 2SG-SUBJV-receive pocket DAT fool INDEF-DEF

e-dze be na-dze.agbagba a-wɔ  
3SG-right COMP AUX-try SUBJV-do

alɔ-a lɔbɔe vi-tukui.  
arm-DEF long small-IDEO

Ne me-nye nenema o-a,  
COND NEG-COP like.that NEG-TOP

wo-a-gbã wɔ fifi-laa.  
3PL-SUBJV-arrest 2SG now-INT

'Before you pick someone's pocket, you have to make your arm very small or else you'll be caught right now.' (a 23-year-old male, Adzagbe Notes, June 7, 2020)

It follows that *wɔ alɔvi* was created from the act of picking people's pocket which some Adzagbe speakers acknowledge as a survival tactic among them.

Another speaker etymology is that of Example 110 *zã dɔwɔnu*, also from Ewe and literally means *use tool*. In one of the researcher's casual conversations with some Adzagbe speakers, one of them made the following statement:

Mí-zã dɔwɔnu hafi fã tra.  
1PL-use tool before do work

Etra katā nɔ kulee.  
work all stay cool

‘We used tool before we did the work, which was all easy.’ (19-year-old male, Adzagbe Notes, June 15, 2020)

Seeing the confusion on the researcher’s face as to what it meant to *zã dɔwɔnu* ‘lit. use tool’ after which you work, he went on:

Míá-me dɔwɔnu-e nye gbekui alo wee.  
1PL-POSS tool-FOC COP marijuana PRT wee

Ne mí-zã-e, hahaha, mí-tra-na vrɛ.  
COND 1PL-use-3SG INTERJ 1PL-work-HAB true

‘Our tool is marijuana or wee. If we use it, hahaha! we work very well.’ (a 19-year-old male, Adzagbe Notes, June 15, 2020)

The laughter in the young man’s words reveals that Adzagbe speakers are well aware of the humour behind their own etymologies. This creativity through humour is an integral part of the creation of Adzagbe.

Examples 111 and 112 of Adzagbe idiomatic expressions on **Table 4.7** are also based on Ewe. These two are used synonymously and interchangeably among Adzagbe speakers. They are *gbevu madogodzi* ‘lit. rogue that does not wear underpants’ and *medekuku gbevu* ‘lit. I beg rogue’. In *gbevu madogodzi*, *gbevu* means *rogue* while *madogodzi* means *without pants*. In *medekuku gbevu*, *medekuku* is formed from the clause *mede kuku* ‘lit. I doff hat/ I remove hat’. Besides, were *medekuku gbevu gbevu medekuku*, the latter could have meant *rogue, I beg you*. These constraints make *medekuku gbevu*

perfect just the way it is. Both expressions mean *weak rogue* or *coward* in Adzagbe. According to a male Adzagbe speaker,

Ne è-be ye-nye dzɔŋki ye ye-pã-na  
COND 2SG-say LOG-COP rogue CONJ LOG-speak-HAB

dzɔŋkivi-wo me gbe-a, è-ɖo la-sẽ.ŋu.  
rogue-PL POSS language-DEF 2SG-reach AUX-strong

Ne me-sẽ o-a,  
COND NEG-strong NEG-TOP

gbevu madogodzi ne-nye;  
rogue naked 2SG-COP

è-le amama alo meɖekuku gbevu ne-nye.  
2SG-VLOC naked PRT I.beg rogue 2SG-COP

‘If you claim to be a rogue and you speak the language of rogues, you have to be strong or else you’re a weak rogue, you’re naked.’ (A 25-year-old male, Adzagbe Notes, June 1, 2020)

It was observed that Adzagbe speakers employ these expressions to refer to those they consider among themselves as weaklings or who are not rogues enough to be considered true members of the Aftown Adzagbe community. Such *meɖekuku gbevu* and *gbevu madogodzi* are weaklings among Adzagbe speakers.

Following *meɖekuku gbevu* is *mpa ke le sky me*, used to refer to God in Adzagbe. *Mpa ke le sky me* is created from Ewe and English words and literally means ‘our father in the sky’. Some Adzagbe male speakers claim they created this idiom from the opening words of the Lord’s Prayer *Our father in heaven*. They have substituted *father* with the Adzagbe word for father *mpa* followed by the Lomégbé words *ke le* ‘who is in...’ and

replaced *heaven* with *sky*. In effect, *mpa ke le sky me* is simply *father in heaven* – obviously referring to God.

Example 114 is *za agbo na ame* created from Ewe and literally means *hit someone with a ram*. *Agbo* is the key Adzagbe term in this expression. It means *ram* in Ewe but *penis* in Adzagbe. *Za*, *zi* and *ya* are Aflaogbe verbs which mean *hit*, making *za agbo na ame* literally *hit someone with a ram*. According to one Adzagbe speaker,

Agbo-e nye ava, è-fũ-a?  
ram-FOC COP penis 2SG-know-Q

Ne è-tse agbo me dzo-wo-a  
COND 2SG-see ram POSS horn-PL-DEF

wo-le abe ava ta ene.  
3SG-VLOC as penis head as

Ta ne è-za gbo na mimbo aḡe,  
CONJ COND 2SG-hit ram DAT girl INDEF

e-fia be è-mo-e.  
3SG-mean COMP 2SG-have.sex-3SG

‘*Agbo* ‘ram’ is penis, you understand? If you look at a ram’s head with its horns, it looks just like the head of a penis, so if you *za agbo na* a girl, it means you have sex with her.’ (A 23-year-old male, Adzagbe Notes, June 16, 2020)

Within this speaker etymology is a metaphor which compares sex act with ram fight. The thought of a comparison of a ram’s head and the head of a man’s penis is interesting to contemplate, but in this creativity lies ingenuity in the identity the youth possess as masters of their language.

Next on **Table 4.7** is *xɔ otofista*, created with the Ewe verb *xɔ* ‘take/receive’ and the name *Oto Pfister*, which is a very popular name in Ghana. Oto Pfister, a German, was a very popular football coach of the Black Stars, Ghana’s national football team, in the 1990s. He was noted for wearing his trousers below the waistline. This *otofista* was born in Ghana to refer to this type of dressing which is very popular among Adzagbe speakers. *Xɔ otofista* traces its origin to Oto Pfister.

The final item on **Table 4.7** *wɔ aɖi* employs Ewe words which literally mean *do poison*. In Adzagbe, it means *woo a girl*. The popular etymology among Adzagbe speakers is that wooing a girl is just like poisoning someone and for a girl to respond positively to a proposal from a boy is like dying from poison and falling right into the hands of her pursuer. The Adzagbe boy metaphorically kills a girl with his poison of wooing her.

#### **4.9 Summary**

This chapter is the second part of the answer to the first research question of this thesis as to what goes into the creation of Adzagbe among the youth of Aflao, Ghana. With focus on etymology of Adzagbe vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, the chapter has discussed six semantic manipulations Adzagbe speakers employ in creating vocabulary, namely, metaphor, metonymy, onomastic synecdoche, euphemism, pejoration and narrowing. The chapter concludes with the speaker etymologies behind some Adzagbe idiomatic expressions. The morphological and phonological manipulations of Ewe-based items and foreign materials as discussed in the previous chapter as well as the semantic manipulations and speaker etymologies of Adzagbe vocabulary in this chapter demonstrate that a lot of consciousness, deliberateness and ingenuity go into these creations. Although Adzagbe speakers are regarded as antisociety by some people, they are masters of their language and they use this tool as their most readily available identity marker. In brief, the presentations in Chapters 3 and 4 are what is involved in the creation of Adzagbe among the youth of Aflao, Ghana.