



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

A sociolinguistic study of an Ewe-based youth language of Aflao, Ghana

Amenorvi, C.R.

Citation

Amenorvi, C. R. (2024, September 26). *A sociolinguistic study of an Ewe-based youth language of Aflao, Ghana*. LOT dissertation series. LOT, Amsterdam. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4092945>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4092945>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

English Summary

Chapter One has introduced the main subject of this thesis – the Ewe-based youth language of Aflao called Adzagbe. It has discussed the debate in the literature on youth language as to which term is appropriate for the phenomenon. The chapter has also introduced the Ewe language and its Aflao variety Aflaogbe as the base language of Adzagbe, and the definition of *youth* in this thesis as referring to young people of fifteen (15) to thirty-nine (39) years old. The chapter pointed out the research problem as a gap on studies on youth languages as there is no known study of an Ewe-based youth language notwithstanding the numerous studies on the Ewe language itself. Besides, the chapter added that since languages differ and possess individual peculiarities, so are youth languages and the growing body of studies on youth languages alone means that each youth language is studied on its own merit. Moreover, this study may reveal aspects of the base Ewe yet to be discovered. The research questions of this thesis, therefore, are what is involved in the creation of Adzagbe and why. Investigations focus on Adzagbe vocabulary, linguistic creativity and innovations, etymology, whether Adzagbe is gendered and/or ageist and finally, the general culture of the youth who speak Adzagbe.

Chapter Two has discussed the theoretical framework and research methodology employed in conducting this study. The theoretical framework employed in this thesis encompasses the interdisciplinary field of anthropological linguistics, complemented by Eckert's (2000) community of practice construct. As regards methodology, the study has adopted the FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship as the overarching research design for the collection and preservation of the Adzagbe dataset. Moreover, the chapter has elaborated on pertinent aspects including the research site Aflao, delineation of the four zones where Adzagbe data was collected, considerations regarding population and sampling, the piloting phase of the study, data collection procedure, ethical considerations, and the data analysis plan.

Chapter Three is the first part of the answer to the first research question as to what goes into the creation of Adzagbe among the youth of Aflao, Ghana. Findings have shown that Adzagbe speakers create vocabulary by morphological and phonological word-formation processes of Ewe-based items and foreign materials, with English and French dominating the latter. Adzagbe morphological manipulations involve word-formation processes as prefixation, suffixation, reduplication, coinages, old words with new meanings and fusion. Of these morphological word-formation processes, prefixation, suffixation, coinages by sound symbolism are largely adopted from Ewe, and unsurprisingly so because Ewe is Adzagbe's base language. However, in their process of suffixation, Adzagbe speakers, as a mark of identity, prefer the ownership marker *-no* which is used to a limited extent in Ewe to the Ewe regular ownership marker *-to*. Adzagbe speakers also employ fusion in tandem with clipping as a word-formation process, a process common in youth languages but not used in Ewe. Phonological manipulations in Adzagbe comprise clipping and metathesis of word syllables. The former is not a regular feature of Ewe while the latter is used to a limited extent in Ewe but used frequently in Adzagbe. Features of Adzagbe performance are loudness, frequent interruptions and overlaps, abrupt change of topics and exaggerated gestures.

Chapter Four 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 Chapter Three as well as the semantic manipulations and speaker etymologies of Adzagbe vocabulary in Chapter Four demonstrate that a lot of consciousness and ingenuity go into these creations and although Adzagbe speakers are regarded as antisociety, they are masters of their language and they use this tool as their

most readily available identity marker. In brief, the presentations in Chapters Three and Four are what is involved in the creation of Adzagbe among the youth of Aflao, Ghana.

Chapter Five describes the general culture of Adzagbe speakers by focusing on four major parts of this youth culture, namely, their physical appearance by dress and grooming, their music, their practices at social gatherings such as weddings and funerals of their peers, and their guynaming (nicknaming) practices. Findings reveal that when it comes to dress and grooming, the Adzagbe youth is immersed in trendy fashion-oriented choices. Among males, hair-dying is a common feature, others wear dreadlocks and many other hairstyles that make them stand out in a crowd. The males also love to wear earrings in one or both ears. Their fashion greatly resembles the dress and grooming of popular music artists or entertainers. Hair-dying is also common among Adzagbe females. A majority prefer to keep their hair short and do without earrings. This change of roles between males and females as regards earring wearing is a clear signal against the overall acceptable culture of the Aflao traditional area. Music plays an important part of Adzagbe youth culture. The very lifestyles of popular artists who echo the values of Adzagbe youth are mirrored and adored by Adzagbe youth. The types of music towards which they gravitate are those in praise of Adzagbe and the Aflao town, those with sexual content and criticism of the establishment. During social gatherings like weddings and funerals of their peers, Adzagbe youth display pomp and pageantry by displaying their material possessions such as expensive cars and motorbikes. They visibly engage in smoking and heavy drinking at these social gatherings. Finally, the practice of guynaming is pervasive among Adzagbe youth and that there is hardly one without a guyname on the part of both males and females. Adzagbe male guynames are characteristic of sexual tones, those based on sweet sounds and those of controversial items or personalities. Female guynames, on the other hand, are largely affectionate ones. In all, while the culture discussed here can be manifested in other youth cultures, the focus here is solely that of Adzagbe youth. The

similarities only confirm the pervasive resemblance among youth cultures across the globe.

Chapter Six discusses whether Adzagbe is gendered and/or ageist. Both the older and younger generations of people of Aflao were observed and interviewed. To have a true reflection of what really is on the ground, both males and females as well as speakers, non-speakers and former speakers of Adzagbe were interviewed. On the part of genderedness, it came out obviously that even though the general attitude towards Adzagbe is a negative one, it is considered more unacceptable among not just the older generation, but also some of the younger generation, to see females speaking Adzagbe or associating with its speakers. Adzagbe, therefore, is clearly a male-dominant language. The answer to the question of whether Adzagbe is gendered, therefore, is affirmative. On the issue of ageism, observations and the interviews reveal overwhelmingly that Adzagbe is rigidly a youth thing in Aflao. It is strictly acknowledged that an older person that shows himself or herself as an Adzagbe youth is looked upon as lacking maturity as former Adzagbe speakers themselves regard it as a childhood thing. The answer, therefore, to the ageism part of the Adzagbe youth identity question is also positive.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis. It summarises findings, discusses the study's implications and provides recommendations. This thesis first sought to find out what is involved in the creation of Adzagbe among the youth of Aflao, Ghana. Findings show that Adzagbe youth manipulate their base Ewe to create a code of their own. They create content lexical items in the grammatical categories of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and idiomatic expressions whose origins are either Ewe or foreign materials. For foreign materials, English and French dominate on the backdrop of the geographic location of Aflao, being the main border town of English-speaking Ghana and French-speaking Togo. Adzagbe speakers employ morphological, phonological and semantic manipulations of lexical items from Ewe or foreign materials to create vocabulary of their own, making Adzagbe in the long run a potpourri of a host of languages. The morphological

manipulations in Adzagbe comprise processes as prefixation, suffixation, reduplication, coinages, old words with new meanings and fusion. Adzagbe phonological manipulations espouse clipping and metathesis of word syllables. Semantic manipulations in Adzagbe are metaphor, metonymy, onomastic synecdoche, euphemism, pejoration and narrowing. History behind Adzagbe idiomatic expressions are interesting speaker etymologies that employ wordplay, exaggeration and humour. The second research question sought to unearth why the youth of Aflao create Adzagbe. Findings show that the most significant reason is that of identity, characterised by their unique culture, which is frowned upon by the older generation and the general culture of Aflao. Male dominant, Adzagbe culture, among others, involves the practice of nicknaming, known as guynames among Adzagbe speakers. This practice concerns themes such as sex, sweet-sounding words, controversial items and persons. Adzagbe culture also includes music with themes of revolt against authorities, sex, beauty, wealth and the love of the Adzagbe identity. The second reason why Adzagbe speakers create a code of their own is to create mutual unintelligibility between them and those they see as a threat.