

## GHANAIAN VERSUS TOGOLESE EWE

Chris Collins  
New York University  
cc116@nyu.edu

Palakimwé Bidadjou  
École Normale de Formation des Professeurs d'École, Notsé, Togo  
bidapalag@gmail.com

Selikem Gotah  
New York University  
selikem@nyu.edu

### Abstract

Based on a survey of some Ghanaian and Togolese dialects of Ewe, this paper shows that there are features that distinguish dialects of Ewe spoken in Ghana from dialects of Ewe spoken in Togo. These features include lexical items, syntactic constructions, pragmatic uses of certain expressions and a hand gesture. Because of these systematic differences, Ewe dialects spoken in Ghana are collectively referred to as Ghanaian Ewe, and those in Togo are collectively referred to as Togolese Ewe.

**Keywords:** Ewe, dialect, Ghana, Togo

### Nugɔmekuku totoɔɔeme

To ɲuɔɔo siwo Eweɔbedola aɔewo na tso Eweɔbe koɔagbe siwo le Ghana kple Togo ɲuti dzi la, nugɔmekuku sia deɔ fia be dzesidede aɔewo li si fia be vovototo le Ghana Eweɔbe kple Togo Eweɔbe dome. Dzesidede siawo kuɔe nyawo, nyagbetutuɔɔowo, nyagbɔgblo aɔewo zazã kple asivavã fomevi aɔe ɲu. Le vovototo siawo ta la, woyɔa Ewe koɔagbe siwo kaã le Ghana *fofui* be Ghana Eweɔbe, eye woyɔa esiwo kaã le Togo *fofui* be Togo Eweɔbe.

**Nyatiwo:** Ewe, koɔagbe, Ghana, Togo

## 1. Introduction

When one hears a person speaking Ewe, it is usually clear whether that person comes from Ghana or Togo. Of course, Togolese speakers of Ewe tend to code-switch into French, so the use of French is an important indicator. Similarly, Ghanaian speakers of Ewe tend to code-switch into English. But putting aside borrowings and code-switching, there seem to be other important differences between the dialects of Ewe spoken in Ghana and those spoken in Togo. To the extent that these differences clearly distinguish Ghanaian and Togolese dialects, we can talk about Ghanaian Ewe versus Togolese Ewe, even though there are many different dialects of Ewe in each country.

There is an array of dialects of Ewe crossing Ghana, Togo, and Benin (see Kluge 2000, 2006, 2007, 2011 for a relevant discussion of Gbe more generally). Here is a very preliminary list of the Ewe dialects based on Ameka 1991, Ansre 2000, Afeli 1978, Kluge 2011 and Ethnologue.

### (1) Ewe Dialects

<b>Ghana:</b>	Adaklu, Aɲfɔe, Aɲlo, Avenɔ, Awudome, Fodome, Ho, Hohoe, Kpando, Kpedze, Peki, Tɔɲu
<b>Togo:</b>	Agu, Avenɔ, Be, Danyi, Gen/Mina, Kpele, Kpesi, ɔɔtse, Vo, Waci, Wudu, Wundi
<b>Benin:</b>	Gen/Mina, Waci

Gen/Mina (also referred to as Gengbe) is generally not considered to be a dialect of Ewe, because of regular sound correspondences that exist between dialects of Ewe but not Gen/Mina (see Capo 1991, Stewart 1994). However, we include it in the list above because it is largely mutually intelligible with Ewe dialects (see Komla 2016:233 and Bole-Richard 1983:7 who classify Gen/Mina as an Ewe dialect).

Gen/Mina is the form of Ewe spoken in southern Togo in Aného and Glidji and nearby towns and villages. It is also spoken in Lomé, and functions as a lingua franca especially in the southern part of Togo (see Rongier 1995a, who calls it a ‘langue véhiculaire’, see also Bole-Richard 1983:5). Agboyibor 2014 (see also Noglo 2009) argues that the dialect of Lomé, which he calls Lomégbé, is distinct from Gen/Mina. We do not take up the issue of differentiating Gen/Mina from Lomégbé here.

In this paper, we pose the question of whether there are any features differentiating the dialects of Ewe spoken in Ghana and the dialects of Ewe spoken in Togo. We find that there are indeed such features, which justifies the use of the terms Ghanaian Ewe versus Togolese Ewe. We focus here on documenting the differences, but give some preliminary remarks in section 4 on the origin of the different features.

Every Ewe dialect has features (e.g., lexical items) that are unique to it. For example, the word for ‘what’ in Kpelegbe is **mení**. We know of no other dialect of Ewe that has this form for ‘what’. But since it is a feature unique to Kpelegbe, we do not want to say that it is a general feature of Togolese dialects of Ewe. Therefore, in the following discussion we restrict our attention to features that are shared by several different dialects in either Ghana or Togo, not features unique to a particular dialect.

Consider now the example of the non-standard word for ‘where’ **gáne** (found in Kpelegbe in Togo and in Tɔɲugbe in Ghana, amongst others). This feature spans both Ghana and Togo, so it does not act to exclude either. Just hearing the use of **gáne** ‘where’ does not tell you whether the speaker is from Ghana or Togo. So, we largely exclude this kind of feature in the discussion below.

Here is some proposed terminology for the features of Ewe dialects that we will be discussing. A Ghana-Togo divider is a feature that is found only in one or the other of the two countries. A near Ghana-Togo divider is a feature that is largely found only in Togo, or only in Ghana, with perhaps a very small number of exceptions in border areas. All of the features discussed in this paper are Ghana-Togo dividers, or near Ghana-Togo dividers.

A Ghana excluder is a feature found in Togolese dialects of Ewe (but maybe not all Togolese dialects), but not found in Ghanaian dialects of Ewe. Similarly, a Togo excluder is a feature found in Ghanaian dialects of Ewe (but maybe not all Ghanaian dialects), but not found in Togolese dialects of Ewe. A common Ghanaian Ewe feature is a feature found in most Ghanaian dialects of Ewe. Similarly, a common Togolese Ewe feature is a feature found in most Togolese dialects of Ewe.

We base our conclusions on a preliminary survey of four Ghanaian dialects and four Togolese dialects. Appendix 1 provides some background information on our consultants. Appendix 2 gives the results of the survey. The Ghanaian dialects in the survey include Aɲlɔgbé, Tɔɲugbe (specifically Mafigbe), and two varieties of the Evedomegbé cluster which are spoken in Alavanyo and Ho. The Togolese dialects include Avegbé, Kpelegbe, Gengbe (Gen/Mina), and Dɔtsegbe. According to Komla (2016:139,216), Ave is the Togolese name for the Avenɔ dialect listed in (1).

The basic findings of the paper have been confirmed more generally in two different ways. First, the first author of the paper posed a series of questions about Ewe dialects on the ‘Evegbenjutinunya (Ewe Linguistics)’ Facebook group from 2018 to 2022. These questions generated extensive discussion from a wide variety of Ewe speakers on Facebook (from both Ghana and Togo). Second, the three authors have had the opportunity to discuss the results of the paper with very extensive social networks (family members, friends, colleagues) of native speakers of Ewe in Ghana and Togo and the United States. So even though the survey discussed in this paper includes only eight dialects (four from Ghana, four from Togo), we are confident that the generalizations reported hold for a greater range of dialects.

## 2. Distinguishing Features

In this section, we present examples of features that distinguish Ghanaian dialects of Ewe from Togolese dialects of Ewe.

### 2.1. *yovó* versus *yevú*

The term **yevú** is defined by Westermann 1973:289 to mean ‘European, white man’. Rongier 2015:844 defines **yevú** to mean ‘Blanc, Européen, Américain’. The term **yevú** is also used in standard Ewe.

But there is another form of the word **yovó**, which clearly distinguishes Ghana and Togo. Togolese Ewe speakers refer to a white person as **yovó**. Apart from the Alavanyo variety of Evedomegbe (see Appendix 2) and perhaps some other varieties, the term **yovó** is not commonly used in Ghana. Rather, Ghanaians generally refer to a white person as **yevú**. This difference between Ghanaian Ewe and Togolese Ewe dialects is lexical.

In the terminology of the introduction, **yovó** is a common feature of Togolese Ewe dialects, and **yevú** is a common feature of Ghanaian Ewe dialects. It remains to be seen whether **yevú** is a Togo excluder. That is, even though the most common word for ‘white person’ is definitely **yovó** in Togo, it remains to be seen whether there are some Togolese Ewe dialects which use the word **yevú** instead.

Another example of a lexical difference between Ghanaian Ewe and Togolese Ewe dialects is the general word for ‘bread’ (e.g., the type one buys on the roadside to be eaten with butter). In Togo, the most widespread word for ‘bread’ is **akpónó**. For example, to say ‘salt bread’, one says **dze-kpónó** (Lit. salt-bread). But in Ghana, the general word for ‘bread’ is **abólo** (see Appendix 2). A slight variant is found among Aɲlɔgbe speakers, who say **yevú-bólo** literally ‘white man’s bread. To say ‘salt bread’ in Ghanaian dialects of Ewe, one says **dze-bólo** or **dze-yevú-bólo**.

Togolese are familiar with the word **abólo** from the Ewe Bible, where it is also used for ‘bread’. But in day-to-day usage, they always say **akpónó**. While **akpɔnɔ**, with varying tones, exists in Ghanaian Ewe vocabulary, it refers to ‘biscuit’ and not ‘bread’. Some Ewe speakers in Aflao, a Ghana-Togo border town, use **akpónó** for ‘bread’, which seems to be a case of diffusion from Togo.

It should be noted that **abólo** (and variants such as **abló**) also refers to a steamed maize dumpling in both Ghana and Togo.

These two lexical items (for ‘white person’ and ‘bread’) are just the tip of a very big iceberg of lexical differences. We hope that our study will encourage others to formulate more comprehensive lexical lists distinguishing Togolese dialects of Ewe from Ghanaian dialects of Ewe.

### 2.2. ‘with’

In standard Ewe, the word for ‘and, with’ is **kplé** (see Westermann 1973: 341). But in some Togolese dialects of Ewe, the word for ‘and, with’ is **kú**:

- |     |    |  |   |
|-----|----|--|---|
| (2) | a. | <b>Me-wɔ dɔ kplé Kofi.</b><br>1SG-do work with Kofi<br>‘I worked with Kofi.’ | (Both Ghana and Togo, ex. from Evedomegbe and Avegbe) |
|     | b. | <b>Me-wɔ dɔ kú Kofi.</b><br>1SG-do work with Kofi<br>‘I worked with Kofi.’   | (Only Togo, ex. from Kpelegbe)                        |

For example, the Kpele dialect only uses **kú**. Speakers of Kpelegbe never use **kplé** when speaking Kpelegbe, although they might use it if they switch to standard Ewe in church or at school (for many examples of the preposition **kú** in Kpelegbe, see Collins 1993). According to the survey (see Appendix 2), all four Ghanaian dialects use **kplé** or **kplí** (Tɔɲugbe), while three of the four Togolese dialects use **kú**, the only exception being Avegbe which uses **kplé**. In Togo there are other interesting variants (related to **kú**) that we will not comment on here (e.g., **kúdó**).

As far as we know, no dialect of Ewe in Ghana uses **kú**. Most of them use **kplé** and its variant **kplí** while others only use the variant **kplí** (e.g., Tɔɲugbe). Once again, **kú** is a clear Ghana excluder. If you hear a person using **kú**, you know immediately

that they come from Togo. Furthermore, **kplé** is not a Togo excluder, since some Togolese dialects use it.

There is a question of whether Gen/Mina has influenced dialects of Ewe in Togo. While borrowing cannot be ruled out, it seems unlikely as a general explanation for the use of **kú** in Togo. First, one of the forms of ‘and, with’ in Gen/Mina is **kúdó** (Bole-Richard 1983:263), but such a form does not exist in Kpelegbe. Second, the Kpele dialect is quite distant from the coast where Gen/Mina is spoken. In the days before cars and trains, it would have taken several days to walk from a village in Kpele to Kpalime and then to Lomé. There is no reason to believe that because of contact between Gen/Mina and Kpelegbe, Kpelegbe lost a preposition **kplé** (which it currently does not have) and acquired a completely different one **kú**. Third, there are dialects closer to Lomé that use **kplé** (not **kú**), such as Avegbe. So, it seems strange to say that influence from Gen/Mina would jump over the intervening dialects and narrow down on Kpelegbe.

The conclusion that **kú** in Kpelegbe has not been borrowed from Gen/Mina leaves open the question of the historical source for **kú** in Togolese dialects of Ewe that have it. Investigating such a question would involve looking at the relevant forms in closely related Gbe languages such as Ajagbe and Fongbe (see Tchitchi 1984:304 and Morley 2011:67 for related forms in Ajagbe).

### 2.3. ‘to forget’

The verb ‘forget’ has two parts, **ɲɔ** and **bé**. It is not a serial verb construction, in the standard sense, since neither part is used with its verbal meaning. For example, the word **ɲɔ** in isolation means ‘to write’ in Ewe, which is not its meaning in the expression **ɲɔ bé** ‘to forget’. Similarly, the word **bé** in isolation means ‘to cut away, to excise, to be bald, to be laid bare’ (see Westermann 1973: 4), which do not fit the expression. We will refer to **bé** as a ‘particle’, on analogy with English particle verbs, such as ‘to write up’ (see Clements 1972: 229 who also analyzes **bé** as a particle.). See also Ameka 1991, which glosses **bé** in ‘to forget’ as a ‘verb satellite’. On serial verb constructions in Ewe, see Collins 1993.

In (3a) below, the object **Kofi** precedes the particle. In (3b), the particle precedes the object. In some dialects of Ewe in Togo, both of the word orders are possible. But in Ghanaian Ewe dialects, only the order in (3a) is found.

- |     |    |   |   |
|-----|----|---|---|
| (3) | a. | <b>Me-ɲɔ Kofi bé.</b><br>1SG-forget Kofi PART<br>‘I forgot Kofi.’ | (Both Ghana and Togo, ex. from<br>Tɔɲugbe and Kpelegbe) |
|     | b. | <b>Me-ɲɔ bé Kofi.</b><br>1SG-forget PART Kofi<br>‘I forgot Kofi.’ | (Only Togo, ex. from Kpelegbe)                          |

In the survey (see Appendix 2), all four Togolese dialects admit the order in (3b) and all four Ghanaian dialects reject that order. In the terminology of the introduction, the order in (3b) is a Ghana excluder. It is also a common feature of Togolese Ewe dialects.

It is worthwhile noting that the word order in (3a) is only possible for noun phrases (e.g., **Kofi**). If the complement is a clause (e.g., ‘I forgot that Kofi left.’), the complement clause must follow **ɲɔ bé** ‘to forget’ in all dialects (from Togo and Ghana). These facts are illustrated below.

- |     |    |  |   |
|-----|----|--|---|
| (4) | a. | <b>Me-ɲɔ bé bé Kofi dzó.</b><br>1SG-forget PART COMP Kofi leave<br>‘I forgot that Kofi left.’            | (Both Ghana and Togo, ex. from<br>Tɔɲugbe and Kpelegbe) |
|     | b. | <b>*Me-ɲɔ bé Kofi dzó bé.</b><br>1SG-forget COMP Kofi leave PART<br>Intended: ‘I forgot that Kofi left.’ |   |

#### 2.4. Obligation

There are different ways of expressing obligation in Ewe. In standard Ewe (and probably most other dialects), one way to express obligation is as follows:

- (5) **É-dze bé má-yi Kpalime.** (Both Ghana and Togo,  
3SG-land that SG.SBJN-go Kpalime ex. from Evedomegbe and  
'I have to go to Kpalime.' Kpelegbe)

There is another way of expressing obligation that appears to be common in Togolese dialects, but not attested in Ghanaian dialects.

- (6) **Me-dólá yi Kpalime.** (Only Togo, ex. from Avegbe)  
1SG-have.to go Kpalime  
'I have to go to Kpalime.'

According to the survey (see Appendix 2), all four Togolese dialects use this construction, but none of the Ghanaian dialects do. As far as we know, (6) is never used in Ghanaian dialects of Ewe even for dialects not listed in our survey. Nor is the expression found in either Westermann 1973: 39, or in Rongier 1995b, 2015. So we can say that **dólá** is a Ghana excluder, and it is also a common feature of Togolese Ewe dialects. See Morley 2011: 65 on a related construction in Ajagbe, and Bole-Richard 1983:318 for Gen/Mina.

#### 2.5. 'Where is Kofi?'

All Ewe dialects in Ghana and Togo have the following kind of question:

- (7) **Kofi dé?**  
Kofi Q  
'What about Kofi?'

Depending on context, (7) can also convey the question 'Where is Kofi?'. For example, if you arrive at a place where you expect to find Kofi, but you do not see him, then you can ask (7) (see Gotah 2024: 52).

The word **dé** is a question particle. In some Ewe dialects, it is possible to add the question word for 'where' to the beginning of the sentence:

- (8) a. **Fika Kofi dé?** (Only Togo, ex. from Agugbe)  
where Kofi Q  
'Where is Kofi?'
- b. **Gáne Kofi dé?** (Only Togo, ex. from Kpelegbe)  
where Kofi Q  
'Where is Kofi?'

In the survey (see Appendix 2), all speakers of Togolese Ewe dialects accept a form like (8a, b). In the experience of the authors, the construction in (8) is very widespread in Togo. However, a reviewer notes that "...while younger Gen/Mina speakers accept (8a), older people do not." If this observation is correct, it means that the construction in (8) is not universally available in Togo.

All four speakers of Ghanaian Ewe dialects in the survey reject constructions like (8). In fact, we have not yet found a single Ghanaian speaker who accepts it. Felix Ameka (April 22, 2022, Facebook) notes: "I have been checking the constructions with speakers of various dialects on the Ghana side: Ewedomegbe more broadly, Anlo and Tongugbe. They all reject the Where Kofi De construction."

So, the 'Where Kofi Q' construction is a Ghana excluder. It is also a common feature of Togolese Ewe dialects.

## 2.6. Future

A common way to express the future in dialects of Ewe is by using the morpheme **a-** (see Ameka 1991: 26, and Essegbey 2008 who analyzes **a-** in Ewe as a modal morpheme marking potentiality):

- (9) **Wó-a-dzó.** (Both Ghana and Togo,  
3PL-FUT-leave ex. from Tɔŋugbe and Kpelegbe)  
'They will leave.'

A different way to express the future in Togolese dialects of Ewe is the following:

- (10) **Wó-le dzá dzó.** (Only Togo, ex. from Kpelegbe)  
3PL-COP FUT leave  
'They will leave.'

In the survey (see Appendix 2), all four Togolese Ewe dialects use (10), but none of the four Ghanaian Ewe dialects do. As far as we know, this form of the future is never used in Ghanaian dialects of Ewe. Once again, this feature is a Ghana excluder and is also a common feature of Togolese Ewe dialects.

The glosses in Bole-Richard (1983: 142, 317, 333) analyze the construction in Gen/Mina as the progressive of the verb *jí* 'want' followed by the future marker *lá*. However, this is not a possible analysis of (10) in Kpelegbe, since any verb in the progressive that does not have a nominal complement is reduplicated, and there is no reduplication involved in (10). We leave the morphological decomposition, syntactic analysis and precise meaning of the form in (10) to future work.

## 2.7. 'Congratulations!'

So far, the differences between Ghanaian Ewe and Togolese Ewe have been lexical or syntactic (e.g., the position of the particle). But there are also commonly used complete expressions that seem to divide the two dialect groups.

Many Togolese speakers of Ewe from a wide variety of dialects recognize the following expression used to congratulate somebody after giving birth, and more generally for overcoming difficulties:

- (11) **Wo-é nyí ta loo!** (Both Ghana and Togo,  
2SG-FOC COP head loo ex. from Aŋlɔgbe and Kpelegbe)  
'Congratulations!'

In the survey (see Appendix 2), all four Togolese dialects use (11), but only one of the four Ghanaian dialects use it (elder Aŋlɔgbe speakers). For the most part, Ghanaians do not know this expression. We can classify it as a near Ghana excluder, and a common feature of Togolese Ewe dialects.

We gloss **nyí** as the copula in (11), which needs some commentary. The nominal copula in Gen/Mina is **nyí** (see Bole-Richard 1983: 26, 269), as opposed to the nominal copula **nyé** found in many other dialects of Ewe. For example, Kpelegbe, Avegbe, and Ɖotsegbe (as well as standard Ewe) all have **nyé** as the copula. In section 4 below, we suggest that the expression in (11) has been borrowed from Gen/Mina into other Ewe dialects. Furthermore, there is no other word **nyí** in Ewe that could naturally provide the gloss in the context of (11). For example, Westermann (1973: 187) lists 'melt', 'suck' and 'fine' as possible glosses for **nyí**, none of which fit the sentence in (11) (see also Rongier 2015: 680-681). For these reasons, we will gloss **nyí** as COP in (11) in all dialects of Ewe where the expression occurs.

## 2.8. ‘God struck him/her.’

A common expression amongst Togolese is the following:

- (12) **Mawu fo-e.** (Only Togo, ex. from Avegbe)  
God struck-3SG  
‘God struck him/her.’

When somebody does something that affects you negatively, just bide your time. Eventually, they will feel the repercussions. And then you can utter the phrase. If you know the person well enough, you can tell them to their face.

- (13) **Mawu Nye fo wo.** (Only Togo, ex. from Avegbe)  
God 1SG struck 2SG  
‘My God has struck you.’

Somewhat surprisingly, given the straightforward syntax and semantics of the expression, it does not seem to be in use amongst the Ewe in Ghana. In the survey (see Appendix 2), all four Togolese Ewe dialects use it, but all four Ghanaian Ewe dialects reject it. One Ghanaian said: “I don’t recognize it and some of my other Ewe friends from Ghana do not know it.”

So, this phrase is a Ghana excluder, and a common feature of Togolese Ewe dialects. This feature is neither lexical nor syntactic, but seems to be pragmatic in nature. The phrases (12) and (13) have their literal meanings (which do not vary from dialect to dialect), but are only used in specific circumstances (which differ from Togo to Ghana).

## 2.9. *sigbe*

A very common expression amongst Ghanaian Ewe speakers is **sigbe**, as in the following example:

- (14) Question: **Sigbe a?** (Only Ghana, ex. from Evedomegbe)  
right Q  
‘Is that right?’  
Answer: **Ee, sigbe ye.**  
yes, right FOC  
‘Yes, that is right.’

This use of **sigbe** corresponds to the word **nene(ma)** which means ‘that way’ in Standard Ewe and other dialects of Ewe. An example with **nene** from Tɔŋugbe is given below:

- (15) Question: **Nene a?** (ex. from Tɔŋugbe)  
right Q  
‘Is that right?’  
Answer: **Ee, nenie yó.**  
yes, right.DEF FOC  
‘Yes, that is right.’

On the usage in (14), **sigbe** means ‘right’. Other translations that people have given are: ‘exactly so’, ‘rightly so’, ‘really’, ‘exactly’. In the dialects that have it, **sigbe** has other uses, which we have not investigated. Therefore, we focus on the use in (14), where **sigbe** is used as an adverbial. That is, it is not followed by any sort of noun.

In the survey (see Appendix 2), the construction in (14) is found in two out of the four Ghanaian dialects of Ewe (Alavanyo and Ho), but it is not found in any of the Togolese Ewe dialects. As far as we know, the construction in (14) is only found in

Ghana, not Togo. It is a Togo excluder. Note, there are Togolese dialects that have the form *sibé* (see Collins 1993: 35), which may be related, but it is never used as in (14).

But it is not a universal feature of Ghanaian Ewe dialects. There are some dialects in Ghana where people reject all uses of **sigbe** (e.g., Tɔɔɔɔɔɔ). The exact distribution in Ghana needs to be investigated further.

### 2.10. ‘Yes, Please.’

All dialects of Ewe have the following expression for ‘please’:

- (16) **Me-ɖe kúkú.** (Both Ghana and Togo,  
 1SG-remove hat ex. from Tɔɔɔɔɔɔ and Kpelegbe)  
 ‘Please.’ (as in asking for something)

For example, Westermann (1973: 135) gives the example:

- (17) **Me-ɖe kúkú ná wo.**  
 1SG-remove hat to you  
 ‘I beg you.’

But only Ghanaian speakers of Ewe use the following expression:

- (18) **Me-ɖe-e kú ee.** (Only Ghana, ex. from Aɔɔɔɔɔɔ)  
 1SG-remove-CL hat yes  
 ‘Yes, please.’

Note that (18) differs from (16) in that the word for ‘hat’ is shortened to one syllable with compensatory lengthening of the vowel in **ɖe**, and the word for ‘yes’ is added to the end. Also, in saying (18), nothing is being asked for.

In the survey (see Appendix 2), all four Ghanaian dialects have (18), but none of the Togolese dialects do. Ghanaian speakers of Ewe use (18) very frequently, but as far as we know, Togolese speakers of Ewe do not use (18) at all. So (18) is a Togo excluder, and it is also a common feature of Ghanaian Ewe dialects.

It should be noted that **me-ɖe-e kú** is a politeness formula that can be used in other contexts as well, which we have not investigated across dialects. These include greetings and making requests, as illustrated in (19) and (20).

- (19) **Me-ɖe-e kú ɔɔɔ.** (ex. from Aɔɔɔɔɔɔ)  
 1SG-remove-CL hat afternoon  
 ‘Please, good afternoon.’

- (20) **Me-ɖe-e kú vá!** (ex. from Aɔɔɔɔɔɔ)  
 1SG-remove-CL hat come  
 ‘Please, come!’

### 2.11. Greetings

A subtle difference between the Ewe used in Ghana and the Ewe used in Togo is in the use of greetings. Consider the following morning greeting, from Avegbe (the Ave dialect in Togo).

- (21) A: **Ddí.**  
 ‘Morning’  
 B: **Ddíí, aféme-tó-wó ɖé?**  
 morning, home-inhabitant-PL Q  
 ‘Morning, how are the people at home?’

- A: **Wó-fǔ.**  
3PL-get.up  
'They are fine.'
- B: **Etsɔ bé dǔ.**  
yesterday POSS work  
'yesterday's work'
- A: **Dǔ tsɔ.**  
work yesterday  
'yesterday's work'

The final line for B signifies that according to B, the last time that A and B saw each other was yesterday. So, it is an indication of the most recent previous meeting date. If they had already met today, the expression would be **égbe bé dǔ** 'today's work'. This kind of greeting is found throughout the Ewe-speaking part of Togo, with only small differences (e.g., the POSS morpheme is **mé** in the Kpele dialect, not **bé**).

But such a phrase in Ghana has a subtly different meaning. Consider the following morning greetings from Tɔɔugbe between peers in an informal context such as meeting at the village square for phatic communion:

- (22) A: **Mónĩ ná-ɔ.**  
morning to-2SG  
'Good morning.'
- B: **Mónĩ. Mi-fǔ-a?**  
morning 2PL-get.up-Q?  
'Good morning. Are you fine?'
- A: **Ee, mí-fǔ. Míɔ hã mí-fǔ-a?**  
yes, 1PL-get.up 2PL too 2PL-get.up-Q?  
'Yes, we are fine. Are you fine?'
- B: **Míɔ hã mí-fǔ.**  
1PL too 1PL-get.up  
'We too, we are fine.'

The expression 'yesterday's work' is not included here. In order for it to be included, either B would have had to have participated in an activity or event A knows about or A and B would have had to have been involved in some kind of activity or event together. For example, if they met to grade a student exam yesterday, today the expression **etsɔ wó dǔ** 'yesterday POSS work' would be included, and responses such as **yoo** 'alright', **etsɔ-é ma** 'yesterday-FOC DEM', **yoo, etsɔ-é ma** 'alright, yesterday-FOC DEM' would be used, as shown below.

- (23) A: **Mónĩ ná-ɔ.**  
morning to-2SG  
'Good morning.'
- B: **Mónĩ. Mi-fǔ-a?**  
morning 2PL-get.up-Q?  
'Good morning. Are you fine?'
- A: **Ee, mí-fǔ. Míɔ hã mí-fǔ-a?**  
yes, 1PL-get.up 2PL too 2PL-get.up-Q?  
'Yes, we are fine. Are you fine?'
- B: **Míɔ hã mí-fǔ.**  
1PL too 1PL-get.up  
'We too, we are fine.'
- A: **Etsɔ wó dǔ.**  
yesterday POSS work  
'yesterday's work'

B: **Etsɔ-é ma.**  
 yesterday-FOC DEM  
 ‘That was yesterday.’

In Ghana, in order to use the expression ‘yesterday’s work’ in a greeting, it is not sufficient just to meet the day before. What makes this difference so subtle is that both groups use the same set of expressions such as ‘yesterday’s work’ and ‘today’s work’, and they both use them in greetings, but the function differs between the two groups of people.

In the survey (see Appendix 2), all four Togolese Ewe dialects use ‘yesterday’s work’ as part of the greeting to mean that the speaker and the interlocutor met yesterday, but none of the Ghanaian Ewe dialects use it in this way. Rather, for the Ghanaian Ewe speakers, in order to use ‘yesterday’s work’, there must have been some work or activity done yesterday that one of the speakers or both the speaker and interlocutor were involved in.

This difference is neither lexical nor syntactic, but seems pragmatic, in that it involves the phrase ‘yesterday’s work’ which seems to have different conventionalized contextual interpretations for the two groups of people (Ghanaian Ewe speakers versus Togolese Ewe speakers).

In addition to the difference between the conventional usage of the expression ‘yesterday’s work’, Ghanaian speakers lack the response **dɔ tsɔ** ‘work yesterday’, which is common in Togo (see (21) above).

### 2.12. Obscene Hand Gesture

The differences between Ghanaian and Togolese Ewe dialects extend to conventional hand gestures. There is a very obscene hand gesture involving extending the right arm in front with the thumb up, and the four fingers bent into the palm. Then the thumb is pressed down, sometimes accompanied by the verbal expression ‘I shit into your mouth’. For a presentation of the gesture, and much relevant discussion, see Ameka 2020.

In the survey (see Appendix 2), all four Ghanaian Ewe dialects incorporate this hand gesture, but none of the Togolese Ewe dialects do. This hand gesture is common in Ghana, but apparently completely unknown in Togo. The accompanying verbal expression is known in both countries. Therefore, the hand gesture is a Togo excluder and a common feature of Ghanaian Ewe dialects. Since the gesture is completely unknown in Togo, it is likely that it is a borrowing from Akan and/or Ga.

### 3. Summary

This paper is really only the tip of the iceberg. In listening to speakers of Ewe from Ghana and Togo, we have noticed many more such differences that we have not been able to cover in this paper for lack of complete data. We believe that such differences will turn out to be quite deep and extensive, influencing every corner of the language (lexicon, syntax, morphology, semantics, pragmatics, phonology, phonetics, gestures, etc.).

The chart below presents a summary of the features discussed in this paper, along with the section numbers where they were discussed.

	<b>Only Togo</b>	<b>Only Ghana</b>	<b>Both</b>
2.1. ‘white person’		<b>yevú</b>	<b>yovó</b>
2.1. ‘bread’		<b>abólo</b>	<b>akpónó</b>
2.2. ‘with’	<b>kú</b>		<b>kplé</b>
2.3. ‘to forget’	<b>ɲɔ bé Kofi</b>		<b>ɲɔ Kofi bé</b>
2.4. Obligation	<b>dólá</b>		<b>dze bé</b>

2.5.	‘Where is Kofi?’	<b>Fika/Gáne Kofi dɛ?</b>	
2.6.	Future	<b>Wó-le dzá dzó.</b>	<b>Wó-a-dzó.</b>
2.7.	‘Congratulations!’	<b>Wo-é nyí ta loo!</b>	
2.8.	Negative conseq.	<b>Mawu fo-e.</b>	
2.9.	‘Right.’		<b>sígbe</b>
2.10.	‘Yes, please.’		<b>Me-dɛ-e kú ee.</b>
2.11.	Greetings	meeting day	joint activity day
2.12.	Obscene gesture		thumb pressing

#### 4. Origins

We have not discussed the origins of these differences in any detail. In this last section, we will offer a few speculative remarks on the issue of origins.

There is a huge cultural dynamic separating Ewe dialects in Ghana from Ewe dialects in Togo. First, there is a geopolitical border separating the two countries. This border influences the movements of populations for the purposes of commerce, religion, education, and employment. Presumably, some of the linguistic features discussed here spread through these population movements. Second, there is the linguistic difference between English (Ghana) and French (Togo), once again creating a barrier between the two countries. These barriers should make it much easier for Ghanaian dialects of Ewe to share features with each other, and similarly for Togolese dialects of Ewe (no matter what the source of the feature).

But just as important is the influence of other languages. Ewe dialects in Ghana may have been influenced by neighbors to the west, including Akan and Ga. Ewe dialects in Togo may have been influenced by neighbors to the east, including Ajagbe and Fongbe (two Gbe languages). It is really a kind of cultural split, Akan/Ga versus Gbe. Whereas Togolese dialects of Ewe fall squarely in the Gbe sphere of influence, Ghanaian dialects of Ewe fall strongly in the Akan/Ga sphere of influence.

For any of the twelve features discussed in the paper, all of these factors must be kept in mind and evaluated. Any one of a number of scenarios could account for feature sharing amongst dialects in a single country. We outline five possible scenarios below.

First, consider some feature X found in Togolese dialects of Ewe, but either absent or uncommon in Ghanaian dialects of Ewe. The origin of X could be Gen/Mina, which as noted earlier is a lingua franca in the southern part of the country. An example of this kind might be the expression **Woé nyí ta loo!** ‘Congratulations’. The copula used here is **nyí**, which is also the copula used in Gen/Mina (see Bole-Richard 1983:269) as opposed to the copula **nyé** found in many other dialects of Ewe. In this case, there is a linguistic cue as to the origin of the expression.

If certain features of Gen/Mina were borrowed into other Ewe dialects, a question is which features were borrowed and which features were not borrowed? For example, in the progressive aspect, Gen/Mina has the word order: Verb Object, a feature not shared by other dialects of Ewe. Why hasn’t this word order feature been borrowed into other Ewe dialects? A wider-ranging survey of shared properties would be needed to begin addressing this question.

Second, Gen/Mina might have a feature X which originated in other Ewe dialects. One possibility is that it got X from a substrate Ewe dialect (perhaps Waci, according to Bole-Richard 1983:7) spoken in southern Togo at the time of the formation of Gen/Mina.

Third, perhaps the origin of the shared feature X is not Gen/Mina, but rather that X caught on somewhere in Togo and spread widely because of the constant movement of people within Togo for commerce, religion, education and employment. For example, the use of the colorful expression **Mawu fo-e** ‘God struck him/her.’ might have become routinized in some area and then spread throughout the Ewe-speaking areas in this way. There is no particular linguistic reason (e.g., the presence of some distinctive morpheme) to assume that the expression originated in Gen/Mina, or spread via the use of Gen/Mina.

Fourth, in addition to these scenarios, we also have to consider influence from neighboring languages. Perhaps the reason Ghanaian Ewe dialects have the obscene thumb gesture is that they borrowed it from neighboring Akan and/or Ga. Then given limited communication over the border, the gesture did not manage to cross over to Togo. A similar account could be given of the ‘Yes, please.’ construction, and its complete absence in Togolese dialects of Ewe. The next step in the research program would be to see if any of the Togolese Ewe features discussed in the paper have direct correlates in Ajagbe and Fongbe.

Fifth, the sharing of X amongst Togolese dialects of Ewe may be a retention from an older form of the language. For example, in the discussion of ‘with’, we pointed out that it is unlikely that Kpelegbe borrowed **kú** from Gen/Mina (even though Gen/Mina has the preposition **kú** ‘with’). Rather, it might be the case that Kpelegbe and Gen/Mina (amongst other Togolese dialects) both retain an older form of ‘with’ that is also found in Ajagbe to the east. This form might have been systematically replaced by **kplé** ‘with’ in other Togolese Ewe dialects and all Ghanaian Ewe dialects. This hypothesis would ultimately need to be verified by reconstructing the vocabulary of proto-Ewe and proto-Gbe.

Our paper does not aim to solve the interesting question of the origins of the individual features discussed in this paper. Rather, it gives rise to specific research directions, setting the stage for such discussions in the future.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we have reported on the results of a survey of eight dialects of Ewe (four spoken in Ghana and four spoken in Togo). On the basis of the survey, we claimed that there are features which distinguish the dialects of Ewe spoken in the two countries. Some features are common in Togo, but absent (or infrequent) in Ghana. Some features are common in Ghana, but absent (or infrequent) in Togo. The features that we looked at include lexical items (e.g., the word for ‘bread’), syntactic constructions (e.g., the ‘Where is Kofi?’ construction), pragmatic uses of certain expressions (e.g., the use of ‘yesterday’s work’), and an obscene hand gesture. On the basis of twelve differences (and many others that we did not have a chance to discuss), we propose that there is an overarching distinction between Ghanaian Ewe and Togolese Ewe. Although we did not take up the origin of these different features in any detail, we sketched a general framework for looking into origins, based on the sociocultural differences separating the two countries.

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## Tone and Abbreviations

In the transcriptions, only high tone is marked. Low and mid tones are not marked. On proper names, no tones are marked.

CL	compensatory lengthening
COP	copula
DEF	definite
DEM	demonstrative
FOC	focus
FUT	future

PART	particle
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
Q	question
SBJN	subjunctive
SG	singular

**Appendix 1: Consultant Information**

Below is information on the 12 native speakers of Ewe consulted for the survey presented in Appendix 2.

Gender:	3 females, 9 males
Country:	4 Ghanaians, 8 Togolese
Age:	1 (20-29), 7 (30-39), 1 (40-49), 3 (50-59)

Country	Dialect	Age	Gender	Location
Ghana	Alavanyo	23	Male	Alavanyo
Ghana	Aɲlɔ	35	Male	Whuti, Anloga
Ghana	Ho	36	Male	Ho
Ghana	Tɔŋu	43	Male	Mafi Anfoe
Togo	Keve	30	Female	Badja
Togo	Keve	34	Female	Badja
Togo	Keve	56	Male	Badja
Togo	Ɔɔtse	32	Male	Notsé
Togo	Ɔɔtse	39	Male	Notsé
Togo	Gen/Mina	39	Male	Notsé, Lomé
Togo	Gen/Mina	55	Male	Lomé
Togo	Kpele	57	Female	Agbanon, Goudeve

**Appendix 2: Dialect Survey**

	Ghana				Togo			
	Alav	Aɲlɔ	Ho	Tɔŋu	Ave	Gen	Kpele	Ɔɔtse
‘white person’	yovó	yevú	yevú	yevú	yovó	yovó	yovó	yovó
‘bread’	abólo	yevúbólo	abólo	abólo	akpónó	akpónó	akpónó	akpónó
‘with’ (Mewɔ́ dɔ́ kú Kofi.)	kplé	kplé	kplé	kplí	kplé	kú	kú	kú
‘to forget’ (Meɲlɔ́ bé Kofi.)	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Obligation (Meɔ́lálá yi Kpalime.)	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
‘where’ (Fíka/Gáne Kofi dé?)	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Future								

<b>(Wóle dzá dzó.)</b>	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Congrats! (Woé nyí ta loo!)</b>	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>‘God struck him/her’ (Mawu foe.)</b>	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Adverbial sígbe</b>	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Yes, please (Meḍee kú ee.)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
<b>Greetings (meeting day)</b>	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Obscene hand gesture</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

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