

A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF YEVEGBE: ANIMIST CULT LANGUAGE IN EWELAND

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This article seeks to analyze the observable similarities and differences between Yevegbe (animist cult language in Eweland) and the Ewe language. The study, which takes into account mainly the lexical, semantic, and syntactic viewpoints, posits that even though a lot of similarities exist between the two languages, Yevegbe appears to have developed complex linguistic structures that make it difficult to be understood or spoken by an Ewe speaker who does not have any training in Yevegbe.

Cet article tente d'analyser les ressemblances et les différences observables entre le yevegbe (langue de culte animiste au pays éwé) et la langue éwé. L'analyse effectuée tient compte en particulier des points de vue lexical, sémantique et syntaxique. Elle postule que, bien qu'il existe beaucoup de points communs entre les deux langues, yevegbe semble avoir développé des structures linguistiques complexes de sorte qu'un éwéphone qui n'aurait pas étudié cette langue aurait du mal à la comprendre ou à la parler.

0. INTRODUCTION

As a child I was always fascinated by the fact that some of my kinsmen who made up a good part of the population of my hometown of Denu, Ghana could speak a language different from our mutual Ewe language after they became initiates of the Yeve cult. The language in question is called Yevegbe,¹ a cult language in Eweland. I often tried to understand this language by listening carefully when they spoke it, but to no avail. The old people in the town, however, could understand them fairly well; not us children. I believe the frequent contacts between the old, who are mostly traders, and the initiates of the cult explain their ability to understand the latter. Besides, all the initiates understand but do not speak the Ewe language because the laws of the cult forbid them to do so. They can, therefore, perceive any difficulty their noninitiate interlocutor is having and will adopt strategies that will enable this interlocutor to decode their message. This interaction between initiates and noninitiates shows clearly that Yevegbe is not a language solely used during rituals; it can be used for general conversations as well. It should be specified that only the new adepts of the cult strictly observe the 'no Ewe-speaking rule'. My informants for instance, who are confirmed adepts of the cult, spoke Ewe to me during the interview.

The word CULT used in this article is somewhat different from the cult defined as "a religious organization whose teachings and practices put it outside the sphere of the society's conventional religious traditions" (Renzetti and Curran 1998:453). This definition is applicable to a cult considered as a new religious movement. But the cult referred to in this article is not a new religious movement; it is the mirror of the traditional pagan religion that has been marginalized today by the growing trend of Christianity in Eweland.

My outlook on Yevegbe is completely external since I am not an initiate and, consequently, do not have the right to enter the shrine. All the information I am giving in this article about life in the shrine was narrated to me by informants, the chief fetish priest Sodoga and his family in their house at Oliboködzi near Devego in Togo. I am very grateful to these wonderful people who have willingly shared their valuable knowledge of Yevegbe with me. All I can say about the shrine is that it is an enclosed compound of about 400 square metres comprising huts used as dwelling places and others used as places of worship. I believe there are more than one hundred such shrines in Eweland.

The teaching in the shrine is based on learning-by-immersion, an efficient communicative approach. The training begins as soon as one enters the shrine. It lasts generally three years. In exceptional cases, recruits finish their training in less than one year.

¹ Yevegbe is composed of **Yeve**, the name of an animist god, and **gbe** which means 'language' in Ewe.

According to my informants, there were formerly about fifty newcomers admitted into the shrine every recruiting season, but today the number has dropped drastically to four or five. The recruiting season is actually not fixed. It is believed that it is the Yeve god itself that calls people individually to join the shrine, and the recruiting season is, therefore, based on the number of calls made by this god. The head of the shrine waits until he gets a sizeable number of people who have received the call before admitting them into the shrine in smaller groups at two-week intervals.

The main teacher and head of the shrine bears the title *Midawoe*.² He is believed to be empowered by the Yeve god during a ceremony where he sits on a sacrificial ram which is then slain in honor of the god. The *Midawoe* does not necessarily have to be an adult; he can be a child. He receives his pedagogical training for a period of seven days inside the shrine.

In fact, inside the shrine, everyone is everyone else's teacher. As the adepts are introduced into the shrine in small groups at about two-week intervals, the newcomers then learn from the old members of the shrine. Apparently, the learning process is very rapid. No language other than Yevegbe is spoken in the shrine and there is a lot of singing going on. Actually every activity is accompanied by a song. Since there is no written support in the learning process, the songs are made of short sentences repeated over and over again, enabling every member to memorize them thoroughly. The shrine is open to male as well as female adepts.

The *methodology* I adopted, which is far from being ideal, consisted of establishing a list of nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and sentences prior to the meeting with my informants who agreed to receive me for only one day. I asked my informants to translate the words and sentences I presented to them. I then transcribed their translation and repeated what I noted to verify the validity of my transcription. I also recorded the interview, but alas the recording came out very poorly. The ideal situation would have been to live with the cult members within the shrine for a certain period of time and collect a substantial body of analyzable data, but this, as I mentioned earlier is not possible for a noninitiate.

The chief fetish priest *Sodoga* was pleased that I was interested in the Yevegbe as a scholar, and he understood that I was going to write about this language and publish my findings. It is highly probable that this language will disappear in no distant future as more parents opt to send their children to school instead of to the shrine. I believe it is a good idea, therefore, that interested linguists should endeavour to conserve this language in any form possible.

The current study seeks to underline the observable differences and similarities between the Yevegbe and Ewe languages as its main *objective*. I do not pretend to analyze the Yevegbe language, for I believe such analysis requires the collection of more extensive data than these used in this article.

I would also like to specify that though Ewe and Yevegbe are both tonal languages, the tonal criterion will not be considered in the analysis proposed here. This tonal criterion is relevant when one is comparing two or more words or morphemes that differ in pitch pattern, e.g., Ewe *éva* 'he/she has come' and *èva* 'you have come', and this is not the case with the words presented in this article. I will, however, indicate the two major tones (high tone and low tone) where they apply.

1. COMPARISON BETWEEN YEVEGBE AND EWE

The data show that some words in Yevegbe are lexically and semantically close to Ewe words. A list of words in Yevegbe having common root morphemes with words in Ewe are given in (1).

² I do not know the meaning of the word *Midawoe*. I only know that it is a title given to the head and teacher of the shrine.

(1)	Yeʋegbe	Ewe	
	agle	agble	farm
	amiagbo	lolo	big
	ekui	ɲku	eye
	enyɔɛ	nyɔnu	woman
	hěgbi	egbe	today
	esúí	ɲutsú	man
	kúhě	kú	death
	niyé	yéyé	new
	nixɔxé	xòxó	old

The word **agle** 'farm' in Yeʋegbe is very close lexically and semantically to its equivalent **agble** in Ewe. The two words differ in that instead of the labio-velar double plosive /gb/ (Martinet 1980:57) in Ewe, we have the velar plosive /g/ (Malmkjaer 1991:221) in Yeʋegbe. Note that the phoneme /gl/ exists in Ewe as well, e.g., **glā** 'to support'; **gli** 'wall', but it is not replaceable with the combined phoneme /gbl/: ***gblā** and ***gblí** are, therefore, not possible.³ It follows that /gl/ and /gbl/ are not variants in the Ewe language, and I believe it is equally true for the Yeʋegbe language. It should be noted that **agle** does not mean anything in the Ewe language.

lolo 'big' is not lexically close to the word **amiagbo** in Yeʋegbe which expresses the same idea. This word may be formed by joining **ami** (close to Ewe **ame** 'person') and Ewe **agbo** 'ram'. Thus, the word **amiagbo** actually means 'a ram-like person', in other words 'a fat/big person'. In Gã, one of the major languages of Ghana, **mamiagbo** (**mami** 'woman' and **agbo** 'ram') means 'a fat/big woman'. There is a striking resemblance between **amiagbo** and **mamiagbo**.

Comparing Yeʋegbe **ekui** with Ewe **ɲku** 'eye', it appears that both contain the radical **ku** which can be interpreted as 'seed' or 'stone of a fruit' in Ewe. It appears that **ekui** and **ɲku** come from the same radical **ku** possibly because of the likeness between the eye and some seeds.

The Yeʋegbe word **ekui** 'eye' is comprised of the prefix **e-** which is widely used in oral Ewe, mainly with monosyllabic nouns, e.g., **etsi** / **tsi** 'water'; **edzo** / **dzo** 'fire'; **eke** / **ke** 'sand'), and the suffix **-i** which expresses smallness.

The Yeʋegbe term **enyɔɛ** 'woman' is very close to the Ewe term **enɔɛ** 'female'. Similarly, the Yeʋegbe term **esúí** 'man' is very close to the Mina⁴ term **asu** 'male'.

The term Yeʋegbe **hěgbi** 'today' seems to be formed by adding the prefix **hě-** and the suffix **-i** to the Ewe word **egbe** 'today'.

There is some resemblance between Ewe **yéyé** and Yeʋegbe **niyé** 'new'. It appears that **niyé** is formed by adding the words **ni** which is close to the Ewe **nu** 'thing' and **yé** 'new', probably a short form of **yéyé**. Thus, **niyé** should mean literally 'new thing'.

The same reasoning applies to the formation of the Yeʋegbe term **nixɔxé** 'old'. The words **ni**, close to Ewe **nu** 'thing', and **xɔxé**, close to Ewe **xòxó** 'old', are added together to form **nixɔxé** which should mean literally 'old thing'.

I have noticed in my data another similarity between Yeʋegbe and Ewe with respect to the notion underlying the naming of items. The Ewe term **mɔlu** 'rice' is expressed in Yeʋegbe as **dayiwo** 'whiteman' plus **gbató** 'corn' giving **dayiwoagbató** 'the whiteman's corn'. This form of naming culturally new items by qualifying existing items with the term 'whiteman' is not alien to the Ewe language. Two examples are given in (2) and (3).

³ The asterisk (*) indicates that the item is unacceptable.

⁴ Mina is a variant of the Ewe language spoken mainly in Togo.

- (2) **yevu** + **bolo**
 whiteman bread
 bread (lit., the whiteman's bread)
- (3) **yevu** + **ne** + **mi**
 whiteman coconut oil
 coconut oil (lit., oil from the whiteman's coconut)

The words yesterday and tomorrow are expressed exactly the same way in Ewe: **etsɔ**. Only context helps to distinguish between **etsɔ** 'yesterday' and **etsɔ** 'tomorrow'.

- (4) **me-wɔ** **dɔ** **etsɔ**
 1s-do^{PAST} work yesterday/tomorrow
 I worked yesterday.
- (5) **ma⁶-wɔ** **dɔ** **tsɔ**
 1s^{FMM}-do work yesterday/tomorrow
 I will work tomorrow.

In (4), the uninflected form of the verbal phrase **wɔ** 'to do' translates an action in the past, consequently **etsɔ** means 'yesterday'. On the other hand, the form **awɔ** 'will do' in (5) translates an action in the future, so **etsɔ** means 'tomorrow'. It follows that the term **etsɔ** can be glossed as 'a day from today', either before or after today. As mentioned in (1), today is expressed as **egbe** in Ewe.

We have a situation quite similar in Yeʋegbe where the word for yesterday is **etre** and the word for tomorrow is **etremɔni**. But unlike the Ewe language, the suffix **-mɔni** added to **etre** in Yeʋegbe helps to distinguish between **etre** 'yesterday' and **etremɔni** 'tomorrow'. The term today in Yeʋegbe is expressed as **hɛgbi** as seen in (1).

2. CHARACTERISTICS SPECIFIC TO YEʋEGBE

Unlike the Ewe language, the words used to express the acts of drinking and eating are quite similar in Yeʋegbe. The expression **dabasi ni**, where **ni** signifies 'thing', means 'to eat' and the expression **dabasi awu**, where **awu** signifies 'water', means 'to drink'. It follows that **dabasi ni** literally means 'to take in something' and **dabasi awu** 'to take in water'. The equivalent expressions in Ewe are **ɖu nu** 'to eat' and **no nu** 'to drink', where **nu** signifies 'thing'.

2.1 THE MEANING OF SOME WORDS

The expression **yaklɔni wɔ** in Yeʋegbe means either 'to teach' or 'to learn' in the same way that **apprendre** in French refers to both meanings. In Ewe, we have **fia nu** 'to teach' and **srɔ nu** 'to learn'.

2.2 PLURAL FORMATION

In the Ewe language, the plural of a word is formed by suffixing the element **-wo** to that word. In Yeʋegbe, however, there is no morphological difference between the singular and the plural. In other words, words are invariable in their plural form in Yeʋegbe as shown in (6).

⁵ Abbreviations in this article: ADVP - adverbial particle; FMM - modal marker of a future event; HMM - modal marker of a habitual event; ID - identification marker; NEG - negation marker; NP - nominal phrase; NPMM - modal marker of a nonpast event; PAST - past event; PRET - preterit; PROG - progression marker; VP - verbal phrase

⁶ **ma** is composed of **me** 'first-person singular' and **a**, the modal marker expressing a future event (FMM). Note that this modal marker is prefixed to the verbal phrase.

(6) Yeʋegbe		Ewe			
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural		
vuzɔli	vuzɔli	avú	avúwo	dog	dogs
asi	asi	afé	aféwo	house	houses
nyāgé	nyāgé	ati	atiwo	tree	trees
kleku	kleku	awu	awuwo	dress	dressess

2.3 PERSONAL PRONOUNS

The first- and second-person singular personal pronouns are both expressed in Yeʋegbe using the term **ami** 'person'. The third-person singular is expressed as **amiha** 'friend to a person'. This notion of person present in the designation of the three pronouns is quite interesting. The French linguist Benveniste (1966:265) describes the third-person singular with respect to the first- and second-person singular as "la non-personne", the non-person, the person not present in a given situation of communication. There is a striking resemblance between this description and **amiha** 'friend to a person' in Yeʋegbe in that **amiha** does not refer to the real persons present in the situation of communication. Example (7) gives the complete list of the personal pronouns in Yeʋegbe and Ewe.

(7) Yeʋegbe	Ewe	
ami	me	I
ami	è	you
amiha	é	he/she
minɔe woɖe himia	mí	we
minɔe	mì	you
wonɔe ɖehiha	wo	they

The first-person plural pronoun is both inclusive and exclusive in the Yeʋegbe and Ewe languages.

2.4 POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

There is also a difference between Yeʋegbe and Ewe possessive pronouns. In Ewe, the particle **tɔ**, expressing the notion of ownership, is used as a prefix in the first- and second-person singular (**tɔnye** 'mine'; **tɔwo** 'yours') and as a suffix in the other pronouns (e.g. **étɔ** 'his/ hers'; **miatɔ** 'ours').

The equivalent of **tɔ** in Yeʋegbe is **-sɔe**. Unlike **tɔ**, **-sɔe** always occupies a suffix position in the formation of the possessive pronouns. The list of the possessive pronouns in Yeʋegbe and Ewe is given in (8).

(8) Yeʋegbe	Ewe	
adɔsɔe	tɔnye	mine
yɔsɔe	tɔwo	yours
yisɔe	étɔ	his/hers
minɔsɔe	miatɔ	ours
yɔsɔe	mìatɔ	yours
amihensɔe	wotɔ	theirs

It is worth noting from (8) that the second-person singular and the second-person plural possessive pronouns are the same in Yeʋegbe whereas they are different in Ewe.

2.5 THE QUALITATIVE ADJECTIVAL PHRASE

It appears from my data that there are at least three ways of forming the qualitative adjectival phrase in Yeʋegbe: (1) using **ni** 'thing' plus a qualifier; (2) using **é** plus a qualifier; and (3) using a descriptive sentence of the form pronoun + predicate. Yeʋegbe examples of these are given in (9)–(17).

ni 'thing' + qualifier

- (9) **ni minɔ**
 thing good
 good (lit., good thing)
 Ewe: **nyui**
- (10) **ni vɪvã**
 thing black
 black (lit., black thing)
 Ewe: **yibo**
- (11) **ni xɔxɛ**
 thing old
 old (lit., old thing)
 Ewe: **xóxó**

é⁷ + qualifier

- (12) **é bliba**
 3s soft
 soft (lit., he/she/it is soft)
 Ewe: **bɔbɔ**
- (13) **é sagã**
 3s strong
 (lit., he/she/it is strong)
 strong
 Ewe: **sesě**
- (14) **é dɛkpě**
 3s small
 (lit., he/she/it is small)
 small
 Ewe: **sue**

A descriptive sentence of the form: pronoun + predicate

- (15) **é-nɔŋɔ⁸ su xogbò**
 3s-be male sincerity
 sincere (lit., he/she is of great sincerity)
 Ewe: **anukwareto**

⁷ **é** used here as the third-person singular pronoun is certainly borrowed from the Ewe language where this element assumes the same function.

⁸ The root morpheme of **nɔŋɔ** (Yeʋegbe 'to be') is **nɔ** which corresponds to the Ewe word **no**, the past form of **le**, the verb 'to be' of localization.

- (16) **amiha-wɔ-a⁹** **bui** **ni**
 3s-do-HMM respect thing
 respectable (lit., he/she does respectable things)
 Ewe: **bubume**

I am not able to say at this stage of the study why **é** sometimes denotes the third-person singular (cf. (15)) but at other times **amiha** (16) assumes the same function.

- (17) **takui-le** **yé** **go-me¹⁰**
 intelligence-be 3s box-inside
 clever (lit., there is intelligence in his/her head)
 Ewe: **nunyala**

2.6 ADVERBIAL PHRASES

Generally, the adverbial phrase is formed in Yeʋegbe according to the pattern:

a + **ɲɔɲɔ** **basi** + qualifier
 ADVP be eat

- (18) **a-ɲɔɲɔ** **basi** **ni-mimɔelo**
 ADVP-be eat thing-evil
 badly (lit., in the state of eating evil things)
 Ewe: **ɔɔɔɔtɔe**
- (19) **a-ɲɔɲɔ** **basi** **ni** **mimɔe** **senufi**
 ADVP-be eat thing good child
 childish (lit., in the state of eating things good for a child).
 Ewe: **ɔɔɔɔtɔe**
- (20) **a-ɲɔɲɔ** **basi** **azizo**
 ADVP-be eat luck
 luckily (lit., in the state of eating luck)
 Ewe: **aklamatɔe**

Two other adverbial structures were found in the data that are derived from the above structure. In the first of these two structures, the item **basi** 'to eat' is absent and in the second structure both **basi** and **ɲɔɲɔ** 'to be' are absent.

Structure without the item *basi*

a + **ɲɔɲɔ** + qualifier
 ADVP be

- (21) **a-ɲɔɲɔ** **bɔe**
 ADVP-be quiet
 quietly (lit., in the state of quiet)
 Ewe: **blewu**

⁹ **a** used here as the modal marker expressing a habitual occurrence of events (HMM) is certainly borrowed from the Ewe language where this element assumes the same function. Note that this marker is suffixed to the verbal phrase.

¹⁰ There is a similar sentence construction in Ewe, where **né** is the attribution marker **na** + **é** '3s'.

nunya **le** **ta-go** **me** **né**
 intelligence be head-box inside 3s
 He is intelligent (lit., there is intelligence in his head).

- (22) **a-nɔŋɔ zɛ adzawa**
 ADVP-be produce noise
 noisily (lit., in the state of producing noise)
 Ewe: **kple afadodo**

Example (22) is slightly different from (21) in that there is a verbal phrase **zɛ** 'to produce' replacing **basi** 'to eat' in the adverbial structure.

Structure without the items *anɔŋɔ* and *basi*

- (23) **bu ni ami**
 respect thing person
 politely (lit., in the way of respecting people)
 Ewe: **bubutɛ**
- (24) **agu be ni**
 sadness of thing
 sadly (lit., thing of sadness)
 Ewe: **nublanuitɛ**

2.7 VERBAL PHRASES

Most of the verbal phrases in our data are formed according to the structure:

verbal phrase₁ + nominal phrase = verbal phrase₂

- (25) **anya kuhɛ**
 know death
 to die (lit., to know death)
 Ewe: **kú**
- (26) **yabasi azizɔ**
 do work
 to work (lit., to do work)
 Ewe: **wɔ dɔ**
- (27) **azɔ adzawa**
 produce noise
 to shout (lit., to produce noise)
 Ewe: **do afaa**

2.8 SYNTACTIC CONSTRUCTION

Affirmative sentences. To express progression in Yeʋegbe, the following construction is used:

NP **é-dɛ** VP **te**

é seems to function as a modal marker expressing a nonpast event (NPMM), and **dɛ ... te** is the progression marker.

- (28) **adɔɔawokpe é-dɛ ni basi te**
 gentleman NPMM-PROG₁ thing eat PROG₂
 The gentleman is eating.

The equivalent construction in Ewe is the following where **le ... m**¹¹ is the item indicating progression.

- | | | | | | |
|------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| | NP | le | VP | m | |
| (29) | ɖɛkadze | la ¹² | le | nu | ɖu-m |
| | gentleman | IDM | PROG ₁ | thing | eat-PROG ₂ |
| | The gentleman is eating. | | | | |

Even though the items expressing progression in Yevegebe and Ewe are made of words that do not seem to be the same, the constructions thus formed are quite similar. In both constructions the progression markers are in two parts, and the VP (verbal phrase) is placed in-between these parts. The main difference is that there is no equivalent of the Yevegebe modal marker **é** in the Ewe construction.

The construction used to express a future event in Yevegebe is the following where **é** seems to function as a modal marker expressing a nonpast event.

NP **é-VP**

The modal marker **é** in the construction indicating a future event (NP **é VP**) is the same as the one present in the Yevegebe construction indicating progression (NP **é-ɖe VP te**). In fact, the only difference between these two constructions is the absence of the progression marker **ɖe ... te** in the former.

- | | | | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| (30) | adɖawokpe | é-basi | dayiwoagbató | etremɔni |
| | gentleman | NPMM-eat | rice | tomorrow |
| | The gentleman will eat rice tomorrow. | | | |

The Ewe construction expressing a future event takes exactly the same form as the equivalent Yevegebe construction, but the modal marker in the Ewe construction is **a** and not **é** as in the Yevegebe construction. The Ewe construction indicating a future event is the following where **a** is the modal marker (FMM).

NP **a-VP**

- | | | | | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| (31) | ɖɛkadze | la | a-ɖu | mɔlu | etsɔ |
| | gentleman | IDM | FMM-eat | rice | tomorrow/yesterday |
| | The gentleman will eat rice tomorrow. | | | | |

The construction that expresses the preterit in Yevegebe is the following where **wo** is the preterit marker (PRET).

NP **wo-VP**

- | | | | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| (32) | adɖawokpe | wo-basi | dayiwoagbató | etre |
| | gentleman | PRET-eat | rice | yesterday |
| | The gentleman ate rice yesterday. | | | |

¹¹ **le ... m** is composed of **le**, verb 'to be' of localization and of **me** 'inside'. Thus **le ... m** can be glossed as 'to be in the process of doing something'.

¹² Placed after a given word, the identification marker **la** indicates that this word has been previously specified.

In the Ewe language, the preterit is expressed by using the uninflected form of the verbal phrase (the verbal phrase without any affix). The corresponding construction in Ewe is:

NP VP

- (33) **ɖekadze la ɖu mɔlu etsɔ**
gentleman IDM eat rice yesterday/tomorrow
The gentleman ate rice yesterday.

Negative sentences. In Yevegebe, negation is formed by introducing the marker of negation **go ... o** into a given affirmative sentence. The negative construction, therefore, takes the form below where **go ... o** to the negation marker (NEG).

NP go VP o

The Yevegebe examples (34) and (36) are the negative forms of (35) and (37), respectively.

- (34) **adɖɔwɔkpe go-ɖe ni basi te o**
gentleman NEG₁-PROG₁ thing eat PROG₂ NEG₂
The gentleman is not eating.
- (35) **adɖɔwɔkpe e-ɖe ni basi te**
gentleman 3s-PROG₁ thing eat PROG₂
The gentleman is eating.
- (36) **adɖɔwɔkpe go-basi ni etremɔni o**
gentleman NEG₁-eat thing tomorrow NEG₂
The gentleman will not eat tomorrow.
- (37) **adɖɔwɔkpe e-basi ni etremɔni**
gentleman 3s-eat thing tomorrow
The gentleman will eat tomorrow.

It appears that, as we shift from the affirmative sentence construction to a negative sentence construction, the modal marker **é** prefixed to the verbal phrase in the former disappears in the latter (cf. (34)–(37)). It will be useful, however, to study other similar constructions before asserting this change as a general rule.

The Ewe examples (38)–(41) show that there is a great similarity between the constructions expressing negation in Yevegebe and Ewe. In Ewe the construction of negation is the following where **me ... o** is the negation marker.

NP me VP o

- (38) **ɖekadze la me-le nu ɖu-m o**
gentleman IDM NEG₁-PROG₁ thing eat-PROG₂ NEG₂
The gentleman is not eating.
- (39) **ɖekadze la le nu ɖu-m**
gentleman IDM PROG₁ thing eat-PROG₂
The gentleman is eating.

- (40) **ɖekadze la ma¹³-ɖu nu etsɔ o**
 gentleman IDM FMM-eat thing tomorrow/yesterday NEG₂
 The gentleman will not eat tomorrow.
- (41) **ɖekadze la a-ɖu nu etsɔ**
 gentleman IDM FMM-eat thing tomorrow/yesterday
 The gentleman will eat tomorrow.

Comparing this construction with the Yeʋegbe construction NP **go VP o**, it appears that the items of negation **me ... o** and **go ... o** occupy the same position in both constructions. The final element **o** is the same in both constructions.

3. CONCLUSION

The analysis in this article portrays how similar and at the same time how different Yeʋegbe is from the Ewe language. There are a number of Ewe words in Yeʋegbe that bear the same meaning such as **wɔ** ‘to do’, **é** ‘3rd-person singular’, and **le** ‘to be (of localization)’. It seems that these words are used concurrently with other words that are specific to Yeʋegbe. It will be interesting to find out the particular contexts in which the words borrowed from Ewe are used and the proportion of such words in Yeʋegbe. I cannot determine at this stage the proportion of those Ewe words that are actually used in Yeʋegbe because of limited data.

It is worth noting that there are also a lot of words that are specific to Yeʋegbe and that make the understanding, let alone the speaking, of this language very difficult for an ordinary Ewe speaker. It goes without saying that the relation between the two languages is quite complex, as shown in the list of numerals in (42). Some numerals are similar in both languages while others are not.

(42) Yeʋegbe	Ewe	
lokpo	ɖeká	one
hũwo	eve	two
hũtɔ	etɔ	three
hũne	ene	four
hũatɔ	atɔ	five
trokpo	adé	six
tsewa	adrě	seven
tsetɔ	enyi	eight
lokpozagahuigo	sieké	nine
hũwui	ewó	ten

The above list shows that the root morpheme **tɔ** is present in Yeʋegbe **hũtɔ** and Ewe **etɔ** ‘three’. We see the root morpheme **ne** in Yeʋegbe **hũne** and Ewe **ene** ‘four’, as well as the root morpheme **atɔ** in Yeʋegbe **hũatɔ** and Ewe **atɔ** ‘five’. But the remaining seven numerals do not have much in common. It is also interesting to note that in Yeʋegbe **lokpozagahuigo** ‘nine’ there is the Yeʋegbe numeral one **lokpo**, the element **hui** that looks like the short form of Yeʋegbe ten **hũwui**, and also the partial negative marker **go**. The term **lokpozagahuigo** can, therefore, be glossed as ‘one from ten’. We have a similar case in Latin where eighteen and nineteen, for instance, are derived from twenty (Latin **viginti**) to give **duodeviginti** ‘two from twenty’ and **undeviginti** ‘one

¹³ **ma** is composed of **me**, the first part of the negation marker **me ... o**, and **a**, the modal marker expressing a future event. Note that this modal marker is prefixed to the verbal phrase.

from twenty'. Note that no numeral in the Ewe language is constructed by this subtraction method.

The similarity between the two languages is quite evident in the case of certain syntactic constructions. For example, with regard to the construction expressing progression, we have, respectively, NP **é-dɛ** VP **te** for Yeʋegbe and NP **le** VP **m** for Ewe (where the negation markers **dɛ ... te** and **le ... m** occupy the same position in both constructions). With regard to the construction expressing negation, the similarity becomes much more apparent, for besides the fact that **go ... o** in the Yeʋegbe construction NP **go** VP **o** and **me ... o** in the Ewe construction NP **me** NP **o** occupy the same position, the final element in the negation marker (**o**) is the same in both constructions. On the other hand, some syntactic constructions do differ in the two languages. This is the case of the preterit in particular. In Yeʋegbe, the preterit construction is NP **wo**-VP and in Ewe it is NP VP.

Some people believe that there is some similarity between Yeʋegbe and the Fõ language spoken in the southern part of the Benin Republic, but I do not have enough evidence to substantiate this viewpoint. It is true, however, that the number one is expressed in Fõ as **ɔkpo** which is quite close to the Yeʋegbe expression **lokpo** in form and meaning.

Finally, in view of the fact that no written document on Yeʋegbe currently exists, I earnestly hope that this article will trigger some feedback that will enable more work to be done on this language which could rightly be classified as an "endangered species".

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