https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gjl.v13i1.5

CONTEXT-CREATED IDEOPHONIC INSULTS AMONG SOME AFLAO-EWE

Cosmas Rai Amenorvi

This study explored on-the-spot context-created ideophones in Ewe insults among some fisherfolk of Aflao, Ghana. Data was collected from a purposive sample of one of the fishing companies in Aflao. Findings reveal novel context-created ideophones which are largely reduplication or triplication of syllables or groups of syllables or a particular vowel sound. The ideophones function as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and interjections. The structure of the insults containing the ideophones is a comparative language that gives meaning to the ideophones. This study has extended the boundary of knowledge of ideophones in the Ewe language in particular, and on ideophonic languages in general, by showing that apart from mainstream ideophones of Ewe, context has the capacity to create novel ideophones whose meaning can only be supplied by the context, revealing the inexhaustible quality of Ewe in creating ideophones. Other ideophonic languages can be studied to ascertain whether the findings of this study are unique to Ewe.

Keywords: context, culture, Ewe language, ideophones, insults; sound symbolism

1 Introduction

The complexity and dynamism displayed in the fibre of language continue to raise linguistic and literary eyebrows. In response to our day-to-day growth and systems, human languages level up by generating new lexical items and expressions to enhance free and easy communication. They rely on word-formation processes to augment already existing words to adequately express thoughts and ideas (Yule, 2023; Fromkin et al., 2017).

One main way languages augment their vocabulary is by borrowing words from other languages. The literature on the importance of borrowing to supplement the vocabulary of languages across the globe is as new as Hoque et al. (2021) and Sasala et al. (2019), as recent as Myers-Scotton (1992a, 1992b), and as old as Sobin (1976). From the numerous studies on

borrowing, we can conclude that there hardly exists any human language without a borrowed element from another language.

Apart from borrowing, languages also rely on other word-formation processes to augment their vocabulary. Some of these are compounding, blending, affixation, conversion, clipping, old words with new meanings, novel creations, and the like (Liu & Liu, 2014). Besides, some languages derive some of their vocabulary from ideophones, which is the focus of this paper. Ideophones are distinctive words that evoke vivid sensory scenes in an imitative fashion and are abundant in languages such as Bantu, Basque, and Japanese (Akita, 2021; Dingemanse, 2019). Another language that employs ideophones as part of its vocabulary is Ewe (Ameka, 2001).

Ideophones are a unique group of words that form a sizeable part of the vocabulary of some languages. Their uniqueness has drawn linguistic attention from as old as Westermann (1930) to as new as Imoh (2021) and Francine (2021). One outstanding uniqueness of ideophones is that they cannot be translated, the reason being that they are language bound (Mokitini, 1996). In the light of that, translations of ideophones are contestable because such translations are just attempts to capture their meaning in another language as best as one could.

The purpose of this study is to investigate on-the-spot context-created ideophones as used in insults among some Aflao-Ewe fisherfolk of the Volta Region of Ghana. The Aflao fisherfolk are noted for employing novel ideophones in their insults among themselves during work or recreations. While there has been some work on mainstream Ewe ideophones such as Dingemanse (2018), Dingemanse et al. (2016) and Ameka (2001), there is no known work on on-the-spot context-created Ewe ideophones such as the ones employed among the Aflao fisherfolk. The present study, therefore, investigates whether these context-created ideophones bear resemblance to the mainstream ones as regards their form and grammatical functions. The study also discusses the structure of the Ewe insults that employ the ideophones in question.

2 Research Questions

This paper provides answers to the following questions:

1. What are the forms of the context-created ideophones in Ewe insults among the Aflao fisherfolk?
2. What are the grammatical functions of these ideophones?
3. What is the structure of the Ewe insults that employ the ideophones?

3 Literature review

This section presents a discussion of some relevant literature in the thematic areas of insults and ideophones, the goal of which is to contextualise the present paper. The following section discusses studies on insults whereupon the next presents a discussion on ideophones.

3.1 Insults

Insults are a unique type of language use to which everyone must have been at a receiving or giving end before. They are prototypical means to express impoliteness in social interactions (Pavesi et al., 2019). There is an increasing body of literature on this unique use of language. For example, Dogbey et al. (2021) conducted a study on the use of insults among the Tongu, Anlo and Ʊedome dialects of the Ewe language. They argue that insults are looked upon among the Ewe as a sign of linguistic competence and cultural consciousness. However, the employment of insults to confirm one's cultural consciousness and linguistic competence is governed by context. It follows that there are insults that suit specific contexts and there are insults that do not. If insults can reveal one's linguistic competence as well as one's cultural consciousness as pointed out by Dogbey et al. (2021), it shows that attention must be given to the study of insults as their study could reveal more about a people's culture.

Moreover, it shows that like music and other ways of a people's culture, insults can serve as a lens into the culture of the world. On that preamble, one of the ways to know an aspect of English, Ewe, French, and for that matter the culture of any people, is to study their insults. Regarding an aspect of French culture, for example, Bertucci and Boyer (2013) argue that verbal jousting and insults are a mode of communication and cultural practice among immigrants from French speaking countries. One may have a culture clash to assume that these immigrants are either quarrelling or fighting among themselves, only to learn as pointed out by

Dogbey et al. (2021) about insults among the Ewe, and by extension, any language, that context is key to understanding this practice.

Another finding of Dogbey et al. (2021) regarding the employment of insults among the Ewe is that the insults employ literary devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, simile, and synecdoche. It shows that even insults employ artistry in language use. If the context of the insults is to create fun, the artistic use of language would, therefore, create humour. On the other hand, if the context is to attack, a piercing artistry of language use can achieve the purpose of hurting.

It must be noted that the context of the insults among the fisherfolk of Aflao under study is that of fun and to create humour and camaraderie among fellows. While the insults lead to heated arguments sometimes, the context is largely for fun and friendship. In this context, the general Ewe culture of the young showing respect to an older person is completely suspended. If one is new to the practice, one could be shocked by the way younger ones insult older ones. However, the laughter that follows these verbal artforms unequivocally explains a context of fun.

The culture of insults among the Ewe is not a new thing at all. About three decades ago, Avorgbedor (1994) discussed one culture of insults among the Ewe which gave people 'license to insult' others. That culture was called *halo*. According to Avorgbedor (1994:84), halo was a "musical-dramatic performance among the Anlo-Ewe from 1912 until its official proscription in 1960". Halo performances were usually done among representatives of villages or individuals who spoke or sang insults at one another. Avorgbedor (1994) reported that some of the things that provoked halo were taking someone's wife, derogatory remarks on another person's music, personal insults, and interpersonal hostilities. These encounters show that one main reason of halo was to employ insults to correct societal ills such as taking someone's wife, which is culturally unacceptable. The use of insults to correct societal ills during these periods

was not strange at all because there were even festivals that allowed chiefs to be insulted (Yankah, 1985). Paradoxically interestingly, one of the ills halo attacked was the use of insults against someone. It is clear that the use of insults as a verbal attack against someone per se is against the Anlo-Ewe culture. The only paradox in the case of halo was that insults were employed to correct insults. At a second thought, the employment of halo insults to correct insults was to teach the one perpetrating the insults the stings of his or her own insults. However, these organised insult party of halo degenerated into violence insofar as halo was outlawed in Ghana in1960.

One thing stands out from the history of halo – it is impossible to completely kill the way of life of a people. While halo may be outlawed and looked upon as dead and gone, it might have been reborn in some way for the ever-present use of insults as a way of life among the Ewe of Ghana as studied by Dogbey et al. (2021). The very focus of this paper, insults among some fishermen of Aflao, could be halo reborn in another form. The insults of the present paper usually take place during work such as pulling the net from sea, dragging the fishing boat out of sea or repairing fishing net and sharing the catch of the day. These insults usually draw laughter from everyone and hardly do they degenerate into physical violence. Halo was banned for its violence. Halo's history may be behind why insults of the present study do not degenerate into physical violence.

Insults have also been studied along gender lines. One of such is Korobov (2017). Korobov (2017) investigated the playful and gendered use of insults and criticisms in romantic couples' everyday banter among twenty young adults. His findings reveal three patterns: first, the majority of insults among the couples investigated are gendered; second, the insults employ irony, laughter, and topic shifts to make the insults playful; and finally, these insults play a significant role in the affiliation of each partner to the other. Korobov (2017) has shown that

while insults may be face threatening, they can play positive roles in social bonding. Besides, they can serve as identity markers.

Several studies such as Scruton (2017), Darweesh and Abdullah (2016) have corroborated Korobov (2017) that insults are gendered among other characteristics in their use. Scruton (2017) shows that women are more likely to be insulted about physical unattractiveness or sexual promiscuity while men fall victim to insults attributed to homosexuality or sexual inadequacy. Darweesh and Abdullah (2016) argue that Donald President Trump's employment of insults, for example, was more directed towards females than males. Felmlee et al. (2020) have revealed that social media is gutted with a plethora of gendered insults such as 'bitch', 'cunt', 'slut' or 'whore'. These words expose feminine stereotypes that are very common on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. It is noted by observation that the target group of this paper, the fisherfolk of Amenuveve Fishing Company in Aflao, Ghana, are largely males. This is because the fishing work is a very strenuous one and females end up as buyers of the fishermen's catch rather than engage in the work itself. The insults under investigation take place among the males only, females do not participate in the practice. If a female contributes to these insult games, she is looked upon as uncultured. While some of the insults employed are gendered, the focus of this study is the ideophones in the insults. These are thoroughly discussed under findings of the study. Suffice is now to say that one major factor of focus in the study of insults is the gender variable.

Insults taken prima facie can be misconstrued as completely negative and can have only negative consequences. At a closer look, however, insults can have unnatural positive effects in some contexts (Amenorvi, 2020). For example, Lobov (1972) and Levine (1978) close to five decades ago studied a ritualised form of insults among Black people in America called 'snapping' where insults are directed towards one's mother or one's person. One of the functions of this 'snapping' is that it creates social distance or proximity (Swhwegler, 2007),

revealing that while superficially negative, insults have been used for positive effects in various contexts. One of such ways that insults are employed to have positive effects is the one under investigation in this paper. We have seen that insults can serve as cultural lenses in order to comprehend the way of life of a people. We also noted that insults employ artistic language and that they can be gendered. While the focus of the present study is context-created ideophones, the insults of the fisherfolk of Aflao project all these characteristics as espoused in the literature.

3.2 Ideophones

Ideophones are generally defined as words that project an idea in sound (Dingemanse, 2012). While the focus has been more on the sound (onomatopoeia) part, ideophones embrace sensory perceptions such as movement, shape, colour, action etc. Some of the world's languages that employ ideophones are Ewe, Akan, Ga, Japanese, Korean, Xhosa and Zula. Since this paper's main focus is the ideophones in the insults among the Aflao-Ewe fisherfolk, this section reviews some literature on Ewe ideophones and those of other languages.

Scholars such as Amuzu (2016) and Ameka (2001) have confirmed that ideophones are a unique feature of the Ewe language. Their stance is a confirmation of Westermann's (1930) study of the Ewe language close to a century ago that the Ewe language is extremely rich in translating an impression into sound. The study of Ewe ideophones is, therefore, not new. The present study acknowledges the efforts put into investigating Ewe ideophones and only seeks to carry the search into new discoveries about the use of ideophones in Ewe.

Ameka (2001) investigated ideophones and the nature of the adjective word class in Ewe. Ameka (2001: 32) argues that "there is no grammatical word class of ideophones as such in Ewe. Thus, there are nominal, adjectival, intensifier, verbal, adverbial as well as an interjection ideophone words". It follows that the ideophones in Ewe are not a main word class on their own but belong to the various word classes according to context. Some ideophones

could even perform various grammatical functions and could be said to have a broad semantic field just as some regular words have.

The examples of Ewe ideophones given by Ameka (2001) are well-known ideophones among Ewe speakers and can be understood even out of context. Some of these examples are as follows:

gbudugbudu 'tumult'

minyaminya 'stealthily'

kpɔdzɔɔ 'fat, thick'

ŋanaŋana 'sweet'

tsaklii 'rough'

nyadrii 'huge'

The foregoing ideophones are just a few of the many examples of ideophones presented by Ameka (2001). As said earlier, all these ideophones are well-known among Ewe speakers. However, the ideophones under investigation in this paper are on-the-spot context-created ones that even their users fail to identify out of context. This study may corroborate Westermann's (1930) words, close to a century ago that, Ewe is reach in translating ideas into sounds. That statement may still be valid in this capacity that Ewe ideophones go beyond already-existing ones that are part of Ewe vocabulary to embrace on-the-spot context-created ones. Ameka (2001) has also shown that Ewe ideophones belong to different word classes and are not a word class of their own. This paper also seeks to ascertain whether Ameka's (2001) assertion also holds for the context-created ideophones identified in this study.

Ideophones permeate other languages too. Imoh (2021) studied the structure of Basa personal names. His findings show that among other things, Basa personal names employ ideophones which undergo some derivational processes. Basa ideophonic personal names function like adjectives because they are generally descriptive of things, places, texture and

manner. Imoh (2021) corroborates Ameka (2001) that ideophones can function as different word classes. As regards Basa personal names, the ideophones function more like adjectives. Imoh (2021) provides some examples of Basa ideophonic personal names as follows: Gbonyo, Gbem and Gwosoin. Imoh (2021) argues that the ideophonic personal name Gbonyo is an exclamatory expression used to name a child born immediately after something great or tragic happens in the family or community. An ideophone like Gbonyo can, therefore, preserve a part of the history of a community. Imoh (2021) continues that the ideophonic personal names such as Gbem and Gwosoin are used to express God's sovereignty as the final judge of all things. From just these ideophonic names, we note the place of history and religion as some cultural functions of ideophones. While the focus of this study is not ideophonic personal names in Ewe, the functions of preserving history and showing one's religion as espoused in Imoh's (2021) study affects one aspect of this paper, which is to unearth the grammatical functions of the ideophones employed in the Ewe insults among the fisherfolk of Aflao.

Like Ewe, Igbo also employs ideophones. Ikegwuonu (2019) studied the syntax of manner adverbials in Igbo. She found that ideophones can be employed to express manner adverbials in Igbo. Some examples of ideophonic adverbials in Igbo are *fiamfiam* 'hastily', g*egelegem* 'stiffness' and *gagaragam* 'tautness'. Some of the ideophones in the Ewe insults under consideration function as adverbials as discussed under findings. One thing worth noting is that most of the examples provided by Ikegwuonu (2019) employ reduplication as a word-formation process of Igbo ideophones. The same is true of many Ewe ideophones (Ameka, 2001). One reason could be that both Ewe and Igbo belong to the same Kwa family of languages.

Japanese is another language full of ideophones. Ratnayake (2015) analysed onomatopoeia related to the word 'laugh' in Japanese. He acknowledges that many ideophones in Japanese cover a wide range of meanings beyond sounds. Ratnayake (2015) argues that

every ideophone related to laugh contains a unique meaning. He gave examples of ideophones related to laughter such as *kerakera* 'shrill laughter', *herahera* 'foolish laugh', *niyaniya* 'friendly grin', *kusukusu* 'giggle' and *nikoniko gao* 'grinning face'. It is interesting that in Japanese, laughter is categorised by ideophones that describe it. If someone laughs *nikoniko*, for example, it means that is a friendly laugh; when one laughs *kusukusu*, that is a giggle. The mastery of these ideophones by a non-Japanese speaker could enable him or her understand the nuances of the use of ideophones in relation to Japanese laughter and also have a deeper comprehension of the Japanese language and culture.

A survey of key studies on ideophones such as Ameka (2001), Childs (1994) and Dingemanse (2018) have revealed such thrusts as phonological, morphological, morphosyntactic, typological, arbitrary and iconic nature of ideophones. Notwithstanding the great insight these have given to the knowledge on ideophones, none of these studies have mentioned or discussed the capacity of context to create on-the-spot novel ideophones as well as provide meaning for them. This is the new direction the present paper seeks to give the study of ideophones.

3.3 Summary

This section has shown that while looked upon largely as face threats, insults can serve as the lenses into a people's culture. Besides, insults employ artistic language as they turn to be descriptive. Such artistry reveals the employment of literary language to convey the threats insults carry. This section has also discussed the roles of ideophones in Ewe and some other languages. We have established that ideophones in Ewe do not belong to one particular word class, neither are they a word class on their own. Ewe ideophones can, however, function as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs , and interjections. We have also seen that ideophones can even be the means through which a language can preserve its cultural history and religion such

as in the case of the Basa language ideophonic personal names. In all, ideophones possess interesting gems worth exploring.

4 Methodology

This study was conducted among the fisherfolk of Aflao Viepe Futa along the coast in the Volta Region of Ghana. A purposive sample of one of the fishing companies, Amenuveve Fishing Company, was adopted for the study, based on an established relationship between the researcher and members of the company during an earlier research. Moreover, there was the availability of data on ideophones among this specific group. The Amenuveve Fishing Company had 15 offshore fishermen, ranging from ages 24 to 61 years. While females are not registered members of the company, they are usually the buyers of the fishermen's catch. The researcher spent eight weeks of November and December 2020 studying the insults of these fisherfolk. He noticed the excessive use of insults for fun among the fisherfolk during work such as mending their fishing nets, servicing their outboard motors, relaxing after a day's hard work and casual talks after their business meetings. These insults among other things contain many on-the-spot created ideophones. After obtaining consent from the fisherfolk, the researcher recorded sessions of these insult-play times with a mobile phone. The recordings were transcribed and the ideophones and the contexts within which they appear were isolated and analysed. Moreover, focus group discussions were held as regards the collected ideophones with the fisherfolk and other Ewe speakers of Aflao as well as some scholars of Ewe who confirm that the ideophones are not part of mainstream known ideophones of the Ewe language such as the ones identified by Ameka (2001). Some of the scholars consulted regarding the ideophones are lecturers of Ewe at the University of Education, Winneba. These novel ideophones were analysed as regards their form, grammatical functions, and the structure of the insults in which they appear.

5 Discussions

This section presents a discussion of the findings of the present study. This is done by responding to the research questions one after the other. The first research question seeks to unearth the form of the context-created ideophones in the Ewe insults; the second seeks to find out the grammatical functions of these ideophones while the third question's thrust is to reveal the structure of the insults in which the ideophones appear.

5.1 Ideophones in Aflao-Ewe insults

This section presents some of the on-the-spot context-created ideophones in the Ewe insults among the fisherfolk of Aflao. These ideophones are not found in the pool of mainstream Ewe ideophones understood in isolation by Ewe speakers such as the ones identified by Ameka (2001) and discussed in this paper. To ascertain the uniqueness of these ideophones as not being part of mainstream Ewe ideophones, the researcher showed the collected ideophones in isolation even to the fisherfolk who use them. They agreed the ideophones sound Ewe but could not understand them in isolation. Even the individuals who used specific ones could sometimes not remember they had used them nor what the ideophones meant until they are put in the context in which they appear. These fisherfolk could, however, understand the mainstream ideophones in isolation as discussed. The same process of verification was carried out among other speakers of Ewe and some scholars – university lecturers of Ewe – who agreed that the fisherfolk ideophones are contextually created and can only, therefore, be understood in context.

Presented on Table 1 below are some of the context-created ideophones and their approximate translations:

Table 1: Some context-created ideophones and their approximate meanings.

Context-created ideophone	Approximate meaning
1. vigbaã	dark and hideous
2. kotopa	grotesque in form
3. futsuku	sitting down relaxed and unconcerned
4. gagbaga	flat, broad and heavy
5. glogbogbo	big and bulky
6. blukutu	sitting down relaxed and unconcerned
7. məgliməgli	sturdy but clumsy way of walking
8. botoglo	big, round and bulky
9. gbagbagbo	idiot, fool
10. hlãhlãhlaã	sound of munching something crispy or hard
11. belembelem	flexible and soft
12. kakabibiibi	sound made by burning nylon material
13. gbogom	sound made by a big bell, big in size
14. tuituitui	sound of a baby's fart
15. nyanyatsɔɔ	watery and nasty
16. tsaafui	watery and nasty
17. gozoglo	bend over
18. tsɔkɔtsɔkɔ	sexual sound

The list above presents some of the context-created ideophones in question. This list is not an exhaustive one but provides a glimpse into the dynamic ability of the fisherfolk to create ideophones at will in their use of insults for fun. We will discuss some of them in context as we answer the second and third research questions. In response to the first research question as to the form of these context-created ideophones, one thing stands out clearly – these ideophones

have employed the word-formation process of reduplication or triplication, which is very usual of mainstream Ewe ideophones. The on-the-spot context-created reduplication manifests in two ways – reduplication of syllables or groups of syllables and the reduplication of one particular vowel sound. Examples of ideophones that employ reduplicated syllables or groups of syllables are as follows:

a. tuituitui	b. bezobezo
hlãhlãhlã	mɔglimɔgli
kakabibiibi	belembelem

Examples in (a) are triplication of single syllables, while examples in (b) are reduplication of two syllables. For the other ideophones that do not seem to employ reduplication, there is at least reduplication or triplication of some vowel sounds. Some of these are as follows:

c. futsuku	gozoglo
blukutu	botoglo
kotopa	gbogom
gagbaga	

For ‘futsuku’ and ‘blukutu’, we note the repetitive use of the vowel /u/; for ‘gbagagba’, we note the recurring of the vowel /a/, while for ‘kotopa’, gozoglo, ‘gbogom’ and ‘botoglo’, we note the repetitive use of the vowel /o/. The foregoing illustrations show that the context-created ideophones in the Ewe insults demonstrate the use of reduplication or triplication one way or the other; either in syllables or groups of syllables or the reduplication/triplication of particular vowel sounds. In all, the answer to the first research question is that the on-the-spot context-created ideophones in Ewe insults among the fisherfolk of Aflao resemble mainstream Ewe ideophones in form, in that reduplication or triplication is a common feature between them.

5.2 Grammatical functions of the ideophones

Data has revealed five main ways the ideophones in question are employed grammatically – as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and interjections This supports Ameka's (2001) assertion that Ewe ideophones do not belong to a single grammatical category but can function as various word classes depending on the context. Let us discuss with examples each of the five grammatical functions of the ideophones used in the insults among the fisherfolk of Aflao.

5.2.1 Ideophones as nouns

Discussed below are some examples of the ideophones used as nouns.

4.

i. E-do **kakabibiibi** be ye-do awu.
3SG-wear IDEO say 3SG-wear shirt
'He is wearing kakabibiibi in the name of a shirt.'

ii. È-ɖoe abe **gbagbagbo** ene.
2SG-lazy as IDEO as
'You are as lazy as gbagbagbo.'

iii. **Belembelem** ya be aleke?
IDEO DEM say what
'What is this belembelem saying?

In Example 4, the ideophones employed are *kakabibiibi*, *gbagbagbo* and *belembelem*. In Example 4i, *kakabibiibi* functions as an object to the Ewe verb *do* 'wear', and, therefore, is in paradigmatic relationship with any noun or noun phrase. It can be replaced in context with nouns like *kuku* 'hat' or *afɔkpa* 'footwear', revealing its unquestionable use as a noun in the example. Explaining what is meant by the ideophone 'kakabibiibi', the speaker who used it said it is the sound made by inferior materials used for clothes such as nylon or polyester when they catch fire. In the light of that, the speaker is insulting a colleague of wearing a shirt made of an inferior material. This reveals the ingenuity behind the on-the-spot creations of ideophones among the fisherfolk of Aflao.

In Example 4ii, someone's laziness is compared to that of the ideophone *gbagbagbo*. The laziness of *è* 'you' is linked by the Ewe comparative phrase *abe…ene* 'as…as' to that of

gbagbagbo. It follows that in such a comparative use of language, the two compared items must belong to the same grammatical category. *È* 'you' is a pronoun; *gbagbagbo* must either be a pronoun or a noun since *è* is in paradigmatic relations with any pronoun or noun, making *gbagbagbo* obviously function as a noun in this context. Regarding the meaning of *gbagbagbo*, the one insulted asked *Nukae nye gbagbagboa*? 'What is the gbagbagbo?' to which the attacker said, *Manya gbaa*? 'How can I tell today?'. The performance was followed by laughter, which means that the *gbagbagbo* is an instant creation to which only context can provide some meaning. In effect, if the speaker himself does not know what *gbagbagbo* is, then the laziness of the victim of the insult in question is incomparable.

Example 4iii is addressed to the same person referred to as *gbagbagbo*. This time he is not compared to anything but referred to as *belembelem*. In the example, *belembelem* functions as the subject of the construction; it is also the head of the noun phrase *belembelem ya* 'this belembelem'. Only other nouns or noun phrases can substitute *belembelem*. It, therefore, functions as a noun. As to the meaning of *belembelem*, its user says the sound perfectly describes the laziness of the victim in question and that he is too slow, too *belembelem* to succeed at any work.

5.2.2.Ideophones as verbs

Some of the ideophones collected also function as verbs. Let us discuss the following examples:

5.

i. Nye-me-**tsɔkɔtsɔkɔ**-na ɖevi-wo abe wò ene o.
1SG-NEG-IDEO-HAB child-PL as 2SG as NEG
'I don't have sex with children as you do.'

ii. E-**gozoglo** ɖe vidzĩ ma dzi abe aʋako-e lé koklovi ene
3SG-IDEO PREP baby DEM POST as hawk-FOC catch chick as
'He has bent over that child like a hawk that has caught a chick.'

In Example 5i, the ideophone *tsɔkɔtsɔkɔ* functions as a verb. The subject of the construction is the pronoun *nye* 'I', followed by the negative marker *me* 'not' which is written with a verb as one word in Ewe orthography One other thing that shows that *tsɔkɔtsɔkɔ* functions as a verb is

that the Ewe habitual marker -na is added to it. Just as the morpheme -ing is only added to verbal elements in English, so is -na only added to verbs in Ewe. *Tsɔkɔtsɔkɔ* is employed as a verb in this case. As to its meaning, the speaker says he is referring to the sound of sex act. This is no doubt the case of an on-the-spot creation based on the way an individual chooses to convey a sound in a word the best way he can.

The ideophone used as a verb in Example 5ii is *gozoglo*. It follows the subject of the construction, which is the Ewe pronoun *e* (he/she/it) and written with a verb as one word the way it is done in Ewe orthography. *Gozoglo* is followed immediately by the postposition 'ɖe', revealing its role as the main verb of the construction. According to the speaker of this insult, the best way he could capture the posture of the one he was insulting as having sex with a minor is by the ideophone *gozoglo*. So far, Westermann's (1930) assertion that the Ewe language has a great potential of employing ideophones in various contexts is corroborated by this study.

5.2.3 Ideophones as Adjectives

Some of the ideophones function as adjectives. Below are some examples:

6.

i. Agbeko **kotopa** ya paa, tsiiaaa!
Agbeko IDEO DEM INT INTERJ
'As for this kotopa Agbeko, come on!'

ii. Emo **vigbaã** abe tsi-e ɖo ene.
Face IDEO as rain-FOC arrange as
'His face is vigbaã like clouds gathered for rain.'

iii. Ame-a katã le **gbagagba glogbogbo** abe tsi le gagbã me ene.
Person-DEF be.at IDEO IDEO as water be.at bowl POST as
'The whole person is gbagagba glogbogbo like water in a bowl.

iv. Aʋa le **gbogom** abe Katoliko tsɔtsi ga ene.
Penis COP IDEO as Catholic church bell as
'His penis is gbogom like a Catholic church bell.'

v. Ye me nu le **nyanyatsɔɔ** abe korela mi ene.
3SG POSS be.at IDEO as cholera faeces as
'His mouth is nyanyatsɔɔ like cholera faeces.'

The ideophones that have functioned as adjectives in Examples 6i to 6v are *kotopa, vigbaã, gbagagba glogbogbo, gbogom* and *nyanyatsɔɔ*. *Kotopa* postmodifies the name Agbeko; *vigbaã* postmodifies *emo* 'face'; *gagbaga glogbogbo* functions as an adjectival complement to the subject *ame-a katã*'the whole person'; *gbogom* also functions as an adjectival complement to the subject *avɑ* 'penis', while *nyanyatsɔɔ* complements the subject *nu* 'mouth'. Speakers of these adjectival ideophones claim they intend to capture in sound the physical form of the one they are insulting. Even though these ideophones are novel and on-the-spot creations, they are understood by one and all as they usually draw laughter from both the ones insulting and those insulted. The fourth way ideophones are employed in the insults in question are that they are used as adverbs. The following section discusses some of these.

5.2.4 Ideophones as adverbs

The following examples illustrate the use of ideophones as adverbs in the Ewe insults among the Aflao fisherfolk:

7.

i. Kpɔ nu-a zɔ-m wò-le **mɔglimɔgli** ɖa.
See thing-DEF walk-PROG 3SG-AUX IDEO PRT
'See how he is walking mɔglimɔgli.'

ii. E-te-te-m **bezobezo** abe da ene.
3SG-RED-crawl-PROG IDEO as sanke as
'He is dragging bezobezo like a snake.'

The adverbial ideophones in Examples 7i to 7ii are *mɔglimɔgli* and *bezobezo*. While these are not part of mainstream Ewe ideophones, they employ a common word-formation process of reduplication or triplication in Ewe, also identified by Ameka (2001) as a very common feature of Ewe ideophones. It means that these creations rely heavily on already-existing rules of Ewe grammar. In Example 7, *mɔglimɔgli* modifies the verb *zɔm* 'walking'and *bezobezo* modifies the verb *tetem* 'dragging'.

5.2.5 Ideophones as interjections

Another function of the ideophones in the insults is that of interjections. The following examples illustrate this conclusion:

8.

i. **Akplatsatsakpla,** e-ɖu mi be ye-ɖu salada!
IDEO 3SG-eat faeces say LOG-eat salad
'Akplatsatsakpla, he has eaten faeces in the name of salad.'

ii. **Gadabugadaba**, alẽtɔ akuakua!
IDEO fool real
'Gadabugadaba, this is a true fool!

iii. Tagbɔkuku-a ka-e ya, **atsalatsala**!
nonsense-DEF what-FOC DEM IDEO
'What nonsense is this, atsalatsala!'

The ideophones functioning as interjections in Example 8 are *akplatsatsakpla, gadabugadaba* and *atsalatsala*. These interjections express surprise and give the insults more force, according to the respondents. They do not mean anything in particular and they are not popular like mainstream Ewe ideophones of surprise such as *tsoo* and *oo*. These ideophonic interjections also employ some form of reduplication or triplication just like the ones discussed earlier.

So far, we have discussed five major ways the Ewe fisherfolk of Aflao employ ideophones in their insults, namely, as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and interjections. Let us now turn our attention to the last research question regarding the structure of the Ewe insults that contain the ideophones.

5.3 Structure of the insults

One main structure stands out throughout data in whatever way the ideophones function, whether as nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs. Let us present the structure in the formula thus:

V= ideo comp. T

where V stands for the victim or the one at whom an insult is directed. The equals = sign represents the link drawn between the victim and the ideo (ideophone), which in turn is comp. (compared) to T (whatever thing or person to whom the ideophone is compared). As noted by

Ameka (2005:360), one way Ewe expresses "similarity in comparison is by use of a similative or semblative construction with the standard of the comparison circumscribed by the form *abe X ene* 'like/as …as". The structure of the Ewe insults follows the same pattern. Let us look at some examples discussed earlier to illustrate this phenomenon.

9.

i. È-ɖɔe **abe** gbagbagbo **ene**.
2SG-lazy as IDEO as
'You are as lazy as gbagbagbo.'

ii. E-gozoglo ɖe vidzii ma dzi **abe** aʋako-e lé koklovi **ene**.
3SG-IDEO PREP baby DEM POST as hawk-FOC catch chick as
'He has bent over that baby like a hawk that has caught a chick.'

iii. Aʋa le gbogom **abe** Katoliko tsɔtsi ga **ene**.
Penis be.at IDEO as Catholic church bell as
'His penis is gbogom like a Catholic church bell.'

iv. E-nu-a zɔm tuituitui **abe** vidzĩ-e nye ŋɔ **ene**.
3SG-thing-DEF walk-PROG IDEO as baby-FOC fart OBJ as
'See how he walks tuituitui like a baby's fart!'

In Example 9i, a victim's laziness is compared to the ideophonic *gbagbagbo* with the comparative Ewe items *abe…ene* (as…as), which run throughout all examples in 9. In 9ii, the ideophonic verb *gozoglo* is compared to the way a hawk catches a chick. In 9iii, the adjective *gbogom* depicts someone's penis being compared to a church bell, while in 9iv, a victim's gait is compared to a baby's fart. As to why speakers employ comparative language in the insults that employ ideophones, the answer is obvious – the comparison is drawn to give meaning to the ideophones. The comparisons are more or less similes, showing that context is key in the creation and unlocking the meaning of these ideophones. All contexts in which the ideophones appear reveal that comparison is drawn between the ideophones and items readily known by the speakers and victims of the insults. Without these comparative contexts, the ideophones will be meaningless or vague.

6 Conclusion and implication

This study has revealed that Aflao-Ewe fisherfolk employ novel on-the-spot context-created and context-based ideophones in their recreational insults among peers. These ideophones function as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and interjections, confirming that Ewe ideophones do not belong to any specific world class but can function as any according to context. It also came to the fore that the insults in question use comparative language as a way of providing meaning to the ideophones. This study implies that both insults and ideophones still contain linguistic phenomena worth investigating and discovering, and ideophones, in particular, should be given renewed attention as regards linguistic investigation. Moreover, the horizon of the knowledge of ideophones on Ewe in particular and on ideophonic languages, in general, has been broadened. First, that context is capable of creating novel ideophones, making the number of ideophones inexhaustible. Second, the findings of this study may not be a sole characteristic of the Ewe language as all languages employ insults and a few others have ideophones like Ewe. These languages can also be investigated to see whether they contain context-created ideophones as does Ewe.

References

Akita, K. (2021). A typology of depiction marking: The prosody of Japanese ideophones and beyond. *Studies in Language*, *45*(4), 865-886.

Ameka, F. K. (2001). Ideophones and the nature of the adjective word class in Ewe. *Typological Studies in Language*, *44*, 25-48.

Ameka, F. K. (2005). Forms of secondary prediction in serializing languages: On depictives in Ewe. Secondary prediction and adverbial modification: The typology of depictive, 355-378.

Amenorvi, C. R. (2020). The paradox of face threats in Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr's speeches. *Nairobi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *4*(4), 91-110.

Amuzu, E. K. (2016). The Syntax of Adverbials in Ewe-English Codeswitching. *Journal of Cognitive Science*, *17*(1), 133-165.

Avorgbedor, D. K. (1994). Freedom to sing, license to insult: the influence of halo performance on the social violence among the Anlo Ewe.

Bertucci, M. M., & Boyer, I. (2013). "Your Mother Is So…" Verbal Jousting and Ritual Insults in Adolescent Immigrants from French-speaking Countries. *Adolescence, 31*(3), 711-721.

Childs, G. T. (1994). African ideophones. In *Sound symbolism*. Edited by Leanne Hinton, Johanna Nichols, and John J. Ohala, 178–204. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Darweesh, A. D., & Abdullah, N. M. (2016). A Critical Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's Sexist Ideology. *Journal of Education and Practice, 7*(30), 87-95.

Dingemanse, M. (2012). Advances in the cross-linguistic study of ideophones. *Language and Linguistics Compass, 6*(10), 654-672.

Dingemanse, M. (2018). Redrawing the margins of language: Lessons from research on ideophones. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics, 3*(1),1-30.

Dingemanse, M. (2019). Ideophone'as a comparative concept. *Ideophones, mimetics, and expressives, 16*, 13-33.

Dingemanse, M., Schuerman, W., Reinisch, E., Tufvesson, S., & Mitterer, H. (2016). What sound symbolism can and cannot do: Testing the iconicity of ideophones from five languages. *Language, 92*(2), 117-133.

Dogbey, E., Mbithi, E. K., Kpodo, P., & Maina, O. M. (2021). The beauty of insult among the Ewe people. *Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies, 3*(1), 1-10.

Felmlee, D., Rodis, P. I., & Zhang, A. (2020). Sexist slurs: Reinforcing feminine stereotypes online. *Sex Roles, 83*(1), 16-28.

Francine, M. (2021). Iconic Morphology and the Study of Ideophones in Ghɔmálá'. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation, 4*(7), 139-147.

Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., Hyams, N., Amberber, M., Cox, F., & Thornton, R. (2017). *An Introduction to Language with Online Study Tools 12 Months*. Cengage AU.

Hoque, M. A., Ali, M. M., Puteh-Behak, F., & Baharun, H. (2021). Lexical borrowings from the English language into Bangla short stories. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 17*(1), 158-172.

Ikegwuonu, C. N. On the Syntax of Manner Adverbials in Igbo Language. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 24 (4), 5-14.

Imoh, P. M. (2021). An Onomastic Study of the Structure of Basà Personal Names. *Ansu Journal of Language and Literary Studies, 1*(5), 56-73.

Korobov, N. (2017). The playful and gendered use of insults and criticisms in romantic couples' everyday banter. *Gender & Language*, *11*(2), 278-305.

Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English vernacular* (No. 3). Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Liu, W.& Liu, W. (2014). Analysis on the word-formation of English netspeak neologism. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, *3*(12), 22-30.

Myers-Scotton, C. (1992a). Comparing codeswitching and borrowing. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development*, *13*(1-2), 19-39.

Myers-Scotton, C. (1992b). Codeswitching as a mechanism of deep borrowing, language shift, and language death. *Contributions to the Sociology ff Language*, *64*, 31-31.

Mokitimi, M. I. (1996). The Sesotho riddle as a poetic text. *South African Journal of African Languages*, *16*(3), 96-100.

Sasala, J. M., Alati, R. A., & Mudogo, B. A. (2019). Lexical Borrowing in Spoken Lukabaras in a Multilingual Context. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, *2*(6), 31-37.

Scruton, E. (2017). Gendered Insults in the Semantics-Pragmatics Interface. *Unpublished Bachelor Thesis Department of Linguistics*, Yale University.

Sobin, N. (1976). Texas Spanish and lexical borrowing. *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, *9*(1-2), 15-47.

Schwegler, A. (2007). Black Ritual Insulting in the Americas: On the Art of" VociferaR"(Colombia)," Vacilar"(Ecuador) and" Snapping"," Sounding" or" Playing the Dozens"(USA). *INDIANA-Estudios Antropológicos sobre América Latina y el Caribe*, *24*, 107-155.

Westermann, D. (1930). *A study of the Ewe language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yankah, K. (1985). Risks in verbal art performance. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 133-153.

Yule, G. (2022). *The study of language* (5th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Glossing Key

1PL – first person plural pronoun

1SG – first person singular pronoun

2PL – second person plural

2SG – second person singular pronoun

3PL – third person plural pronoun

3SG – third person singular pronoun

AUX – auxiliary

COMP – comparison

COP – copula

DEF – definite article

DEM – demonstrative pronoun

FOC – focus

HAB – habitual marker

IDEO – ideophone

INTERJ – interjection

LOC – locative

NEG – negative

OBJ - object

PL – plural

POST – postposition

PROG – progressive marker

SG – singular