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LEXICAL NOMINALIZATION IN EWE: A MORPHOSYNTACTIC VIEW

Innocent Selasie Akorli

Abstract

This paper studies action nominalization in Ewe, according to Comrie and Thompson's (2007) categorization: action/state nominalization, agentive nominalization, instrumental nominalization, manner nominalization, locative nominalization, and objective nominalization. It investigates how these nominalization types manifest in the language. The paper finds out that the above-mentioned nouns are derived, mainly, through the processes of reduplication and suffixation. Again, a single form can qualify for more than one category of noun, as in the case of the suffix *-fe* for deriving process/action and locative noun. Agentive noun can be derived by an agentive marker, *-la'*. The paper introduces time nominal, which denote the time for 'verbing' or the time that an action or activity takes place. Time nominal can mark the time for an event, season, or duration. Finally, the paper argues that a single verb phrase permed with different suffixes can derive a range of nouns in Comrie and Thompson's (2007) framework.

Keywords: nominalization, agentive marker, locative, instrument, objective

1. Introduction

A few studies that cover lexical nominalization in Ewe include Duthie (1996), Ameka (1991), and Ofori (2002), inter alia. These studies focused on subjects such as the strategies available for forming nominal compounds (Ofori, 2002), the properties of nominalization in Ewe (Ameka 1991), and some dialectal differences in nominalized forms (Agbedor, 1996). However, to the best of my knowledge, there has not been any study which systematically focuses on the formation of nouns of different kinds (e.g., locative, agentive, manner, instrumental, etc.), from a single base or stem. Against this background, the paper seeks to find an answer to the question: What are the various ways by which we can form a range of lexical nouns? More specifically, the paper has the objective to show the types of nouns (e.g., locative, instrument, agentive, manner, etc.) all of which may not be available in a single language, but are possible in Ewe. The meaning of these nouns can be delimited in context. The current paper therefore attempts the formation of various categories of nouns (time, instrument, manner, location, etc.) in the framework of Comrie and

Thompson (2007). The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a brief literature review; Section 3 gives a brief background of the Ewe language; Section 4 introduces lexical nominalization; Section 5 provides a brief comment about nominalization in Ewe; Section 6 identifies some key methods of forming nouns in Ewe; Section 7 explains how almost all the types of Comrie and Thompson's (2007) nouns are supported by the morphology of Ewe; section 8 summarizes the main arguments; and section 9 provides a conclusion of the paper.

2. Literature Review

This paper departs from Ofori (2002) in both scope and theoretical orientation. While Ofori provided a general morphological description of how nominalization occurs in Ewe, mainly through reduplication, compounding, and affixation, the present study goes further by situating Ewe nominalization within the typological framework of Comrie and Thompson (2007). This approach enables a systematic exploration of the functional categories of nominalization, including action/state, agentive, instrumental, locative, manner, objective, and temporal types. The paper also demonstrates that nominalization in Ewe is not merely a morphological phenomenon but a morphosyntactic one, involving regular alternation between verbs and their arguments. Significantly, it introduces temporal nominalization as an independent and productive category in Ewe, a feature not previously documented in the literature. In essence, my voice in this paper lies in reinterpreting Ewe nominalization from a typological and morphosyntactic perspective, showing how a single verbal root can generate multiple nominal categories, thereby revealing the multifunctionality and structural flexibility of Ewe nominalization.

3. The Ewe language and some of its typological features

According to Duthie (1996, p. 1), Ewe is a Niger-Congo Kwa language spoken in Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Badagry in Nigeria. The term Ewe is a cover term for a cluster of dialects which actually belongs to the broader term GBE, which is each dialect's word for voice or language. Ewe, properly, refers to a group of sub-dialects spoken in the south-eastern part of the Volta Region of Ghana across to parts of southern Togo as far as the Togo-Benin border (Ameka 1991). In Ghana, the language is spoken mainly in the Volta Region, which is located in the southern part of the country. In Ewe, tone is contrastive; that is, the language can distinguish the meaning of two forms by tone. The data for the research were collected from the Volta regional capital, Ho, and its neighboring towns, which form part of what is often referred to as Ewedomegbe or 'Inland' or 'western interior' dialects (Ansre 1961; Capo 1991).

4. Lexical Nominalization

Nominalization, according to Comrie and Thompson (2007), is 'turning something into a noun' (p. 334). Mathews (2005, p. 244) explains nominalization as 'the process by which either a noun or a syntactic unit functioning as a noun phrase is derived from any other kind of unit'. Comrie and Thompson's definition may be non-specific as 'something' is not well defined; perhaps in more specific terms, the grammatical categories that can be turned into nouns may include verbs,

adjectives, and other nouns (see Mathews, 2005). Payne's definition of lexical nominalization being the product of manipulation of a verb may be English-specific: 'the relationship between the verb and its nominal can be formulated by $V \rightarrow N$ Action designed by V ' (Payne, 1997, p. 244). Languages around the world have different strategies to form nouns from other grammatical units (Comrie & Thompson, 2007). Payne (1997, p. 224) notes that English can form a noun from a verb by the use of a 'zero' operator, by which no affixes are added to the verb-form, but the difference between the noun and the verb can only be determined by the position the form occupies in a sentence.

- (1) a. *I walk to school.*
 b. *Let's go for a walk* (Payne, 1997, p. 244).

Example (1a) above presents 'walk' as a verb, licensing a subject that precedes it and a complement that follows it. In (1b), 'walk' functions as a noun because it is the name of an activity; secondly, it occupies a position, which qualifies it as a noun. That is, syntactically, it is an object of the preposition 'for.' According to the grammar of English, a noun can be preceded by an article, which in this case is a(n). Appah (2005, p. 133) notes that tone is lexically contrastive in Akan, a Kwa language spoken in Ghana. So different sets of tonal patterns on the same morphological form can change a verb to a noun, as shown in example (2) below.

- (1) i. *nàntsèw* 'walk' (V)
 ii. *nántséw* 'walking' (N) (Appah, 2005, p. 133)

As in English, Ewe has forms that function as verbs and also as nouns. It is the position the word occupies in a sentence that determines its grammatical category. The form *kú*, in Ewe, functions as a verb in (3) and a noun in (4).

- (2) *dèví-á kú*
 child-DEF die
 'The child died.' ('kú' functions as a verb)

- (3) *kú wù dèví-á*
 death kill child-DEF
 'Death killed the child.' (kú functions as a noun).

In the following section, I show instances where nominals are formed not only affixation to verbs but by a complex structural construction.

5. Action Nominalization in Ewe

Action nominalization is very productive in Ewe. Notable among these action-nominalization strategies are reduplication and suffixation. This paper discusses the various types of nominalizations according to Comrie and Thompson's (2007) categorization, namely, action/state nouns, agentive nouns, instrumental nouns, manner nouns, locative nouns, and objective nouns. The strategies that are employed in the derivation of the action noun in each case will be explained as the various forms of nominalizations are discussed. In the discussion, every number introduces an example of an action or stative verb, and an arrow points to its noun form. The numbers bearing a, b, c, etc., show how the examples given are used in syntactic constructions to show that they are verbs and examples of nouns that are formed from these verbs.

The derived noun denotes the fact, the act, the quality, or the occurrence of that verb or adjective. In the entire paper, it is illustrated syntactically that the derived nouns possess the characteristics of a common prototypical noun. Through their distribution, they occupy subject and object positions in sentences. In addition, they appear as possessed items in inalienable possessive construction, and they can be focused. The following section discusses some noun formation processes in Ewe.

6. Some strategies for forming nouns in Ewe

The following section discusses some nominal formation processes in Ewe.

6.1 Reduplication

In the analysis below, item 5(a) shows how a verb is reduplicated to form a nominal, item 5(b) shows the syntactic distribution of the root word as a verb, and item 5(c) shows how the reduplicated material can occupy the position of a noun.

- (5a) *dzó* *dzòdzó*
 depart → depart RED
 'depart' 'departure'
- (5b) *É* *dzó*
 3SG leave
 'He/she left'
- (5c) *É- fé* *dzò-dzó* *tsɔ̀*
 3SG-POSS depart RED quick
 'His/her departure was quick'

6.2 Serial verbs

Serial verbs can also undergo a morphological process to form a noun. The first verb is reduplicated, and the second is suffixed to the reduplicated form of the first. There is no alternation of the positions of the verbs, nor is there any permutation. Example (6) below shows how a verb

phrase is turned into a nominal; 6b shows the syntactic slot of the verb phrase, and 6c shows how the output formed from the verb functions as a nominal in a syntactic construction.

- (6) *zɔ̌ vá → zɔ̌-zɔ̌- vá (zɔ̌zɔ̌vá)*
 walk come walk RED come
 ‘Coming by walking’ (Ofori 2002, p. 176)

- (6b) *zɔ̌ vá kábá*
 walk come quickly
 ‘Come quickly’

- (6c) *zɔ̌-zɔ̌- -vá nyé dɔ̌*
 walk RED-come is task
 ‘Coming by walking is a task’

6.3 Compounding

Nouns, which denote the name of something, can be formed from compounding of verbs. In their formation, two action serial verbs are compounded into a single action nominal where the action nouns depict actions that are associated with the verbs. In this case, there is no permutation or re-ordering of the verbs, but two verbs that syntactically follow each other are compounded morphologically to form a single noun. It is observable from the output that the verbs maintain their positions with no space between them, akin to how they appear in the serial verb construction. There are tonal changes in the compound. For example, in (7), a series of low-high tones yields low, low-high tones on the last vowel in the compound. 7(a) shows the nominal in context. These tonal changes sometimes depend on the dialect of the speaker.

- (7) *dà flé → dà- flě*
 cook buy cook(ed) buy
 ‘Cooked meal for sale’
- (7a) *É flé- a dà- flé*
 3SG buy-HAB cook-sell
 ‘He/she buys food prepared for sale’

6.4 A verb plus an object

Similar to the action verb-action verb compounding to form a nominal, we can also have an action verb plus its internal object, which are juxtaposed into a single action nominal, denoting a noun

that is associated with the verb. Item (8) shows how the nominal is formed, and (9) shows its syntactic function as a nominal.

(8) *dzè àhà* → *dzàhà*

buy drink buyer (of) drink

‘Dzàhà’

NB: *dzèàhà* → *dzàhà* (following the deletion of /e/ in favour of /a/ at the word boundary).

(9) *dzà-hà mé nó - a tsí o* (Ofori 2002, p. 179)

Buyer-(of)-drink NEG drink-HAB. water NEG

‘(A) buyer of drink does not drink water’ (an Ewe proverb)

6.5 A verb plus its inherent argument

Another way of forming action nominalization is the use of a verb phrase as a base or stem, where the syntactic order of a verb and its internal argument/object is reversed, with the verb part being reduplicated. The object, in this case, is an obligatory element without which the verb does not have any syntagmatic relevance. Item (10) shows the formation of the nominal; (10a) and (10b) show the verb and its inherent argument, and how the nominal is formed from the verb, respectively.

(10) *dà tú → tú- dà-dà*

fire gun gun fire RED

‘Firing/act of firing a gun’

(10a) *Kofi dà tú*

Kofi throw gun

‘Kofi fired a gun’

(10b) *É- fě tú- dà-dà qì*

3SG POSS gun fire RED sound

‘His/firing of a gun sounded.’

Another instance of nominalization of action verbs and their internal arguments involves re-ordering or a permutation of the verb and its internal argument. However, unlike the previous category, the verb in this case does not undergo reduplication. Item (11) shows how the nominal is formed from a verb and its direct object. (11a) shows the slot for the verb, while (11b) shows the slot for the internal argument.

- (11) *nyá nú → núnyá*
 know thing thing know
 ‘Knowledge/wisdom’
- (11a) *É nyá nú*
 3SG know thing
 ‘He/she is intelligent/wise’
- (11b) *Núnyá lè é- sí*
 wisdom is 3SG hand
 ‘He/she is wise.’ (He/she has wisdom)

6.6 Nominalization of Double Object Constructions

It is possible to form nominal from a verb phrase that takes two objects. The verb and the first object alternate their positions, the verb reduplicates and the second object is suffixed to the re-ordered, reduplicated form, as shown in (12) below. These forms of nominalization name things or actions.

- (12) *dà tú xèví → tú- dà-dà- xèví*
 fire gun bird gun fire RED bird
 ‘Bird-shooting’
- (12a) *É dà tú xèví*
 3SG fire gun bird
 ‘He/she shot a bird’
- (12b) *É- nyá tú- dà-dà- xèví*
 3SG know gun- fire-RED-bird
 ‘He/she is good at bird-shooting’

6.7 Stative verbs and stative nouns in Ewe

Ewe uses stative verbs to express adjectives; therefore, some forms (adjectival) that describe nouns behave syntactically as verbs. The syntactic slot for verbs is illustrated in 13(a) and 13(b), and from this, it is clear that the descriptive in 13(c) and 13(d), *lolo* ‘be big’, and *’kɔ* ‘be tall,’ respectively,

are verbs. To form stative nouns from the stative verbs in 13(c) and 13(d), the verbs should be reduplicated or triplicated. Consider the examples in 13(e) and 13(f).

- (13) a. *É- vá* (to show the syntactic distribution of a verb)
 3SG come
 ‘He/she came’

- (13) b. *É- dzó* (to show the syntactic distribution of a verb)
 3SG leave
 ‘He/she left’

- (13) c. *É- lólò*
 3SG be big
 ‘He/she is big’
 (A stative verb has the same distribution as an action verb as in 13a and 13b.)

- (13) d. *É- kɔ́*
 3SG be tall
 ‘He/she is tall’
 (A stative verb has the same distribution as an action verb as in 13a and 13b.)

- (13) e. *É fě lólò nyó* (stative verb duplicates to form a stative noun)
 3SG POSS big RED good
 ‘His/her/its size is satisfactory’ (lit. His/her/its ‘bigness’ is good.)

- (13) f. *É fě kɔ́-kɔ́ nyó* (stative verb duplicates to form a stative noun)
 3SG POSS tall RED good
 ‘His/her/its height (is) satisfactory/good’ (lit. His/her/its ‘tallness’ is good.)

The stative noun *lólò* sometimes has a variant *lólòmè* and *kɔ́kɔ́* sometimes appears as *kɔ́kɔ́mè*. The suffix *-mè* denotes dimension.

6.8 Agentive Nominalization

Agentive nominalization means an action verb turned into a noun which denotes the ‘one who performs an action’ (Comrie & Thompson 2007, p. 338). In this case, the noun denotes an agent with the verb. In English agentive noun (doer of an action) is formed from action verb by adding the suffix *-er*. However, the process is constrained in a way, as not every word that ends in *-er* qualifies as the doer of an action. For instance, ‘Laser’

Agentive nouns can be formed in Ewe by suffixing the particle *lá* to an action verb or an action verb phrase. Action verbs such as *dù* ‘eat’, *yì* ‘go’, *kpɔ* ‘see’, can take *lá* but not without an obligatory direct object, without which the construction will be ungrammatical (The phenomena is observed for Kwa languages including Akan (Anderson 2013, Appah 2013; Appah et al. 2017;) Lɛtɛ (Akrofí-Ansah 2012a), Esahie (Broohm 2019). Consider the case for Ewe following examples:

- (14) a. *dù* (eat) → *dùlá* (eater)*
 b. *yì* (go) → *yìlá* (goer)*
 c. *kpɔ* (see) → *kpɔlá* (seer)*

These forms do not give a specific meaning because the verb must have an object for the agentive noun to be well-formed. For example, 14a above will attract the question, which is equivalent to ‘what eater?’ 14b, ‘where goer?’ and 14c, ‘what seer?’ This suggests that, in Ewe, it is obligatory for a verb and its internal argument to undergo nominalization as a unit to make the output semantically relevant. The verb and its internally/inherent argument reverse their positions, and the particle *lá* is suffixed to the reversed form to form a noun, as illustrated in (15) below.

- (15) a. *dù nú* → *nú- dù- lá*
 eat thing thing-eat-AGENT
 ‘eat’ ‘thing’ ‘eater’
- (15) b. *yì àgblè* → *àgblè- yì- lá*
 go farm farm- go -AGENT
 ‘go to farm’ ‘farm goer’
- (15) c. *kpɔ nú* → *nú- kpɔ- lá*
 see thing thing see-AGENT
 ‘to see’ ‘seer’

There are, however, some action verbs + *lá* that are straightforwardly meaningful. For instance,

- (15) d. *xɔ* + *lá* → *xɔlá* (leader)
 get/save +AGENT ‘redeemer’
- (15) e. *kpɛ* + *lá* → *kpɛlá* (leader)
 lead + AGENT ‘leader’

Agentive nouns can be derived from reduplicated motion verbs: *yì* ‘go,’ *sí* ‘run away,’ and *dzɔ* ‘depart,’ etc. However, the agentive nominalization particle *lá* must be suffixed to the reduplicated form to make the surface form encode the agentive meaning. Example (16) explains the phenomenon.

- (16) a. *yì/dè* → *yì-yì- lá* /*dèdè- lá*
go /go go- RED -AGENT / go-RED-AGENT
‘go’ ‘goer’/ ‘goer’
- (16) b. *sí* → *sì-sí-* lá (fugitive /a runaway)
run away run- run-RED -AGENT
‘fugitive /a runaway’
- (16) c. *dzó* → *dzó-dzó- lá*
depart depart-RED-AGENT
‘A person who departs/leaves’

6.9 Instrumental nominalization

Instrumental nominalization is a morphological process that forms nouns from action verbs. The noun that is formed refers to an instrument. In Ewe, an instrument noun is formed by suffixing the morpheme **-nú** ‘thing’ to action verb and its internal argument. The verb and its internal argument usually interchange their positions prior to the suffixation of the morpheme **-nú**.

- (17) a. *dà nú* → *nú- dà- nú*
cook thing thing cook thing
‘cook’ ‘cooking utensil’/ ‘instrument for cooking’
- (17) b. *fò àmè* → *àmè -fò- nú*
beat person person beat thing
‘to beat a person’ ‘an instrument for beating (a) person’/‘cane’

This process of forming instrumental nouns by suffixing **-nú** to an action verb is productive, but it does not specify a particular instrument that is used for any specific activity. For example, in (21a) above, **núdànú** is a cover term for all cooking utensils: pot, ladle, saucepan, and spoon, etc. To make reference to a specific instrumental noun, the suffix **-nú** must be replaced by the specific item that one wants to refer to. The structure will be formulated as the reversed positions of a verb and its internal argument, followed by a specific instrument: *xy =yx+* (specific instrument). The following, therefore, will be more specific instrumental nouns:

- (18) a. *dà nú* → *nú- dà- zé*
cook thing thing-cooking-pot
‘cook’ ‘cooking pot’
- (18) b. *fò àmè* → *àmè- fò- àtí* (àmèfòtí) [after the deletion of /a/]
beat person person-beat-stick
‘beat (a) person’ ‘cane’ (stick for beating (a) person)

6.10 Manner nominalization

Manner nominal means ‘way of verbing’ can be formed in Ewe by the use of the suffix, *-fé*. The reduplicated form of an action verb describes a process or indicates manner nominal. Sometimes, the form that denotes action nominal (19) can function as manner nominal. The reduplicated form, which qualifies as manner nominal, sometimes takes the locative marker *-mè*. The following constructions show how a form qualifies as manner nominal.

- (19) a. *É- fé nú- qù- fé mé nyá kpó ná o* (manner)
 3SG-POSS thing-eat-place NEG MOD see HAB NEG
 ‘His (manner of) eating is not beautiful’
- (19) b. *É- fé hàdzidzì mé nyá sè ná o* (manner of singing)
 3SG POSS singing NEG MOD hear HAB NEG
 ‘His/her (manner of) singing is not pleasant to hear’
- (19) c. *É- fé zò-zò- mè mé nyá kpó ná o*
 3SG POSS walk-RED-LOC NEG MOD see HAB. NEG
 ‘His/her way of walking is not pleasant to see’

6.11 Locative Nominalization

Locative nominalization involves creating a noun that means ‘a place where an action verb happens.’ Just like manner nominal, Ewe uses the morpheme *-fe* as a suffix to a verb and its internal argument, reversing their positions, and the locative particle is suffixed to the reversed structure. The examples below illustrate this phenomenon.

- (20) a. *dó dzò* → *dzò-dó-fé*
 set fire fire-set-LOC
 ‘Set fire’ ‘kitchen’ (fire-setting place)
- b. *qà nú* → *nú-qà-fé*
 ‘cook thing’ ‘thing-cook-LOC
 ‘cook’ ‘Kitchen’

Locative action nouns can be formed from an action verb or a series of action verbs to which the morpheme *-fe* is suffixed. In the case of the serial verbs, their position is not re-ordered.

- (21) *zò* → *zò- fé*
 walk walk-place

‘Walking place/footprint’

- (22) *É fé zɔ̀ fé enyè si*
 3SG POSS walk place is LOC
 ‘This is (his walking place)/where he walked’

- (23) *zɔ̀ tó* → *zɔ̀ tó- fé* (route)
 walk pass/through walk pass place
 ‘Route’

- (24) *É fé zɔ̀ tó- fé ényé ési*
 this his/her walk pass place is this
 ‘This is where he/she pass/route’/ ‘This is his/her route’

6.12 Objective Nominalization

In Ewe, it is possible to form a nominal designating the result, or the typical cognate object of an action. It creates a noun from a verb, where the noun means the object that results from an action. The word form for process or action nominalization can be the same for object or objective nominalization. Consider the following cases:

- (25) a. *flè àmè àmè- fɛflé*
 buy person → person buy RED
 ‘Person buying’(process/action)
- b. *àmè- fɛflé nyé dɔ̀*
 person buy RED is task/work
 ‘(The process of) buying a person is a (daunting) task.’
- c. *É nyé àmè- fɛflé* (object/objective)
 3SG is person buy RED
 ‘He/she is slave’ (He/she is a bought person)
- (26) a. *qà nú* (cook thing) → *núqàqà* (process/action)
 cook thing thing cook RED
 ‘cook thing’ ‘cooking’
- (26) b. *nú- qàqà nyé dɔ̀*
 thing-cook-RED is (a) task

‘Cooking is a task’

- (26) c. *tsɔ' nú- dɔ̀dɔ̀ -lá vɛ'* (objective)
 take thing cooked RED-DEF bring/3SG
 ‘Bring the cooked food’

Sometimes, the definite article *-la* which is reduced to *-a* is suffixed to the objective nominal: *àmɛ̀fɛ̀flɛ̀a* (the person that is bought), *núdɔ̀dɔ̀a* (the thing that has been cooked).

6.13 Temporal nominalization

Ewe can derive action nouns from action verbs, where the nominal means ‘the time of verbing.’ The time nouns can specify a period, or a singular occurrence, or a season. This derivation process also involves a re-ordering of the verb and its internal argument to which the suffix is added. The derivation suffixes include *-yí*, *-gbè*, *ɲɔ̀lĩ* and *wòé*

- (27) a. *dzɔ̀ nú* → *nú- dzɔ̀ yí*
 contribute thing thing contribute time
 ‘offer’ (verb) ‘offertory/contribution time’
- (27) b. *dɛ̀ àgbɛ̀lɛ̀* → *àgbɛ̀lɛ̀- dɛ̀- wòé*
 go farm farm make time
 ‘make a farm’ ‘farming time/season’
- (27) c. *nò àhà* → *àhà- nò- gbè*
 drink drink drink drink day
 ‘take (a) drink’ ‘drinking time/day’

7. Productivity of verb phrases and nominalization in Ewe

In the foregoing discussion, firstly, it is obvious that a single nominalizer morpheme can form the base for the derivation of more than one category of nominals, for example, a process or locative noun. This phenomenon exists because nominalization is highly polysemous (see, for example, Lieber, 2018, p. 1). Secondly, by reversing the syntactic order of an action verb and its internal argument, we may derive different nominals. For example, the verb phrase, *dɔ̀ nú* (cook (thing)), may have the order of the verb and its object reversed as *núdɔ̀* to form the base for the formation of a range of nominals in the structure *núdɔ̀* + suffix. The following serves as a summary of items discussed. Consider the following below:

- (28) a. *nú- qà- lá lá vá núqala* [agent]
 thing-cook-AGENT DEF come
 ‘The cook has come.’
- (28) b. *nú-qà-qà nyé dɔ́ núqàqà* [action]
 thing-cook-RED is task’
 ‘Cooking is (difficult) task’
- (28) c. *é- le` nú- qà- fé- á núqàfé* [location]
 3SG be at: PRES thing-cook-place-DEF
 ‘He/she is at the cooking place’
- (28) d. *é- yì nú- qà- (gé)=fé núqàfé* [action]
 3SG-go thing-cook-ING
 ‘He/she is going to cook.’ Note: (gé)=*fé* for inland speakers
- (28) e. *flè nú-qà-nú áqé núqànú* [instrument]
 buy thing-cook-thing SPECI
 ‘Buy (a) cooking utensil’
- (28) f. *tsɔ́ nú-qà-qà lá vá àfi núqàqà* [object]
 take thing-cook RED DEF come here
 ‘Bring the (cooked) food here’
- (28) g. *nú-qà-yí ényé ésià núqàyi* [time nominal]
 thing-cook-time is this
 ‘This is cooking time’

8. Summary

The paper investigates action nominalization in Ewe. The strategies involved in nominalization in Ewe are largely morphological and syntactic. Morphologically, the process includes reduplication, permutation, and affixation or a combination of two or more of these processes. Syntactically, for the most part, the process involves re-ordering the positions of serial verbs. The ‘nounness’ of the derived nouns is tested: they can function as an argument of a verb (as subjects and objects of verbs), and they can be focused. The paper has established the following: first, in Ewe, adjectives can function as verbs, and their noun forms are derived by reduplication or triplication; second, agentive nominalization can be formed by the suffixing *-lá* to a reversed order of a verb and its internal argument; third, instrumental nominalization can be formed by suffixation of *-nú*, which

makes the derived nominal general in meaning; however, when the need arises to indicate specificity, a specific item needs to be suffixed to the verb stem which is composed of a verb and its internal argument reversed instead of *-nú* to derive that specific instrumental nominal; fourth, time nouns can be formed by the suffixes (a verb and its internal arguments alternate their positions) *-yí*, *-gbè*, *ɲɔlí* and *wòé*; fifthly, in some cases, one nominal that belong to one category can function as a member of another category. In this case, the exact category the noun belongs to can be determined by the syntactic construction in which it occurs. Finally, it is demonstrated that a range of nouns may be formed from a single verb phrase.

9. Conclusion

This study has examined the morphosyntactic processes underlying lexical nominalization in Ewe, drawing on Comrie and Thompson's (2007) typology of nominalizations. The analysis has demonstrated that Ewe employs a systematic range of morphological strategies, particularly affixation and compounding, to derive diverse noun forms from verbal bases. Crucially, the study highlights a significant and unique contribution to the typology of nominalization in Kwa languages: a single verbal root in Ewe can serve as the base for generating multiple categories of nominalizations, including action, agentive, locative, instrumental, manner, objective, and temporal nouns. This finding underscores the productivity and flexibility of Ewe morphology and reveals the rich potential of the language to express various semantic roles through nominal forms derived from a common lexical source. It also contributes to broader linguistic discussions on the interface between morphology and syntax, particularly how a single morpho-syntax base can be exploited to generate a spectrum of grammatical functions. By demonstrating the multifunctionality of nominalizing processes in Ewe, this study enriches our understanding of both the internal structure of Ewe and the typological diversity of nominalization cross-linguistically. Future research could explore the semantic constraints, frequency patterns, and possible diachronic developments associated with these nominalizations, further illuminating the dynamic processes of word formation in Ewe and related languages.

ABBREVIATIONS

RED: Reduplication, HAB: Habitual, NEG: Negation, POSS: Possession, AGENT: Agentive, MOD: Modal, LOC: Location, ING: Ingressive, SPECI: Specifier, DEF: Definite article

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WHAT THE EWE MIND THINKS IT IS: A CASE OF SOME EVERYDAY EXPRESSIONS

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Abstract

Like many languages, Ewe exhibits metaphor as a pervasive feature, evident in expressions about emotions, death, sensation, and time. Yet its metaphorical conceptualisation of the human mind has received little scholarly attention. This study addresses that gap by examining everyday expressions that reveal culturally grounded models of cognition and the linguistic expression of thought. Data were collected from 20 older-generation native speakers of Ewe through interviews and conversational observation. Analysis within Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cultural Linguistics identified nineteen metaphors of the mind, notably those of distance, depth, temperature, purity, turbulence, and divorce. These metaphors function as conceptual tools that reflect embodied experience and cultural values, situating cognition within social, moral, and communal contexts. The findings show that Ewe metaphors of the mind are systematic and context-sensitive, demonstrating how cognition is socially constructed and dynamically expressed through language. Highlighting Ewe perspectives, the study diversifies metaphor theory and affirms the intellectual sophistication inherent in African languages.

Keywords: Cognitive linguistics; conceptual metaphor; Ewe language; cultural linguistics; human mind

1. Introduction

Metaphor is a fundamental mechanism through which human beings conceptualise experience. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) famously argued, metaphor is pervasive in everyday language, thought, and action, shaping how individuals understand abstract domains such as emotion, time, morality, and mental states. Far from being confined to poetic or rhetorical expression, metaphor operates at the level of cognition, allowing

speakers to map familiar embodied experiences onto more complex or intangible phenomena.

Across languages and cultures, metaphor serves as a bridge between the physical and the conceptual, the observable and the internal. In this regard, African languages offer fertile ground for exploring how metaphor reflects and reinforces culturally specific ways of knowing. The Ewe language has received scholarly attention for its metaphorical richness. Some studies have explored Ewe metaphors in domains such as death (Amenorvi, 2024a), sensation and time (Sevor, 2019), and emotions (Ameka, 2002; Amenorvi, 2024b). These works affirm the expressive and conceptual depth of Ewe, particularly in its use of metaphor to encode cultural values and social commentary. Despite this growing body of research, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning metaphorical expressions about the human mind. While mental states are central to everyday interaction and cultural interpretation, the metaphorical framing of the human mind in Ewe has yet to be systematically examined. This study addresses the problem of the underexplored metaphorical framing of the human mind in Ewe, despite its centrality to everyday cognition and cultural interpretation.

By examining Ewe metaphorical expressions about the mind, the study will contribute to a broader understanding of how language reflects cultural models of thought. It will also affirm the importance of African languages in advancing metaphor theory and invite a rethinking of cognitive linguistic frameworks through the lens of indigenous epistemologies. This study, therefore, seeks to answer the questions of which metaphors are employed in Ewe everyday expressions about the mind and any peculiarities these metaphors may possess.

2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), first articulated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), represents a paradigm shift in the study of metaphor, moving it from the periphery of rhetorical flourish to the core of human cognition. CMT posits that metaphor is a fundamental mechanism through which individuals conceptualise abstract domains of experience. According to this view, metaphors are systematic mappings between a *source domain*, typically grounded in concrete, embodied experience, and a *target domain*, which is often abstract or intangible. For instance, the popular metaphor *THE MIND IS A CONTAINER* allows speakers to conceptualise mental activity in terms of spatial containment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5).

One of the most compelling contributions of CMT is its emphasis on the embodied nature of cognition. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that our sensorimotor experiences form the basis for metaphorical thought, a claim that has been substantiated across a range of languages and cultures. This embodied grounding enables metaphors to function as cognitive tools that structure reasoning, influence perception, and shape social interaction.

The theory has thus found resonance in disciplines as diverse as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and discourse analysis.

However, CMT has not gone unchallenged. Critics have pointed out that early formulations of the theory tended to underplay the role of context in metaphor use. Kövecses (2020) addresses this limitation by proposing an *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, which incorporates socio-pragmatic and discourse-level factors into the analysis. He argues that metaphor is not only a cognitive phenomenon but also a context-sensitive and dynamic process, shaped by communicative intent, cultural norms, and situational variables. This extension is particularly relevant for this study, which explores metaphor in culturally embedded, everyday discourse.

Another critique concerns the literal-figurative dichotomy that underpins much of early CMT. Scholars such as Yu (1998) and Sharifian (2011, 2017) have demonstrated that what is considered “literal” is often culturally contingent. Yu’s (1998) comparative study of Chinese and English metaphors, for example, reveals that metaphors like *ANGER IS HEAT* or *TIME IS SPACE* may appear universal but are realised differently across linguistic communities. Sharifian (2011, 2017), in turn, introduces the notion of cultural conceptualisations, arguing that metaphors are shaped by distributed cultural cognition and collective memory. His framework is particularly useful for analysing metaphors in African languages, where communal epistemologies and oral traditions play a central role in meaning-making. Furthermore, the static nature of source-target mappings in early CMT has been problematised. Critics contend that metaphor is frequently emergent, hybrid, and multimodal. Blending Theory and dynamic systems approaches have been proposed to account for the fluidity of metaphor in real-time discourse (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). These developments suggest that metaphor is not just a mapping between two domains but a creative act of conceptual integration, often involving multiple inputs and contextual cues.

In light of these developments, CMT remains a robust yet evolving framework. For the study of Ewe metaphors about the mind, CMT offers a powerful lens through which to uncover how abstract cognitive processes are grounded in culturally specific bodily and social experiences. At the same time, integrating insights from Extended CMT and Cultural Linguistics will allow for the contextual, communal, and multimodal dimensions of metaphor in Ewe discourse. This approach will enrich the theoretical scope of the analysis and contribute to the diversification of metaphor theory by spotlighting African epistemologies and linguistic practices.

2.1 Cultural Linguistics

Cultural Linguistics provides a complementary lens to Conceptual Metaphor Theory by highlighting the role of cultural conceptualisations in shaping language use. Developed by Sharifian (2011, 2017), this framework argues that cognition is not only embodied but also distributed across members of a community, emerging from shared experiences, collective memory, and cultural schemas. Cultural conceptualisations are instantiated in

language through recurring metaphors, categories, and schemas that reflect communal ways of knowing.

Within this perspective, metaphors are also cultural resources that encode values, moral orientations, and social practices. Sharifian (2011, 2017) identifies several types of cultural schemas such as event schemas, role schemas, image schemas, and emotion schemas which provide the interpretive backdrop against which linguistic expressions are understood. For example, in Ewe discourse, metaphors of the mind may draw on communal notions of *susu* ‘mind’, moral reasoning, and ancestral knowledge, situating cognition within a broader cultural ecology rather than solely within an individual’s mental processes.

Applying Cultural Linguistics to the study of Ewe metaphors of the mind may highlight how collective epistemologies shape metaphorical constructions. By integrating Cultural Linguistics with CMT, the analysis will move beyond structural mappings to reveal how metaphors of the mind in Ewe are embedded in socially negotiated meanings and culturally distributed cognition. This theoretical addition strengthens the study by situating Ewe metaphors within both cognitive and cultural paradigms. It demonstrates that metaphor is simultaneously a tool of thought and a repository of cultural knowledge, affirming the intellectual depth of Ewe as a language that encodes communal models of cognition.

2.2 Literature Review

Within the CTM framework, metaphors allow speakers to conceptualise emotion, morality, time, and mental states by drawing on spatial, physical, and social domains. This cognitive perspective has inspired a growing body of research across languages and cultures, including African languages, where metaphor serves as a vital conduit for encoding cultural knowledge, moral values, and social commentary. One of such studies is Afreh (2015). She examined metaphorical and metonymic structure concerning the heart between Akan and English through the theoretical lenses of conceptual metaphor. She found no major differences in the way the Akan and English conceptualise the heart. Both languages conceptualise the heart as a living person, a living organism, an object of value, and a container. According to Afreh (2015), while there are no striking differences in the way English and Akan conceptualise the heart, there are slight differences in the language-specific conceptualisation attributed to cultural modes found in the two languages. It shows that there are universals as well as language specifics as regards metaphorical conceptions in human languages. While the present study is not a comparative one like Afreh’s (2015), it concerns something closely related to the human figurative heart – everyday expressions about the human mind. It could reveal similarities between conceptualisations of the mind and the heart among the Akan, English and Ewe languages, and pave a way for future studies regarding the two concepts.

Metaphors indeed permeate human interactions and conceptualisations even in naming practices. Wonkyi et al (2021) explored conceptual metaphors in sea creature naming strategy in the Fante dialect of the Akan language. They discover that there is the general metaphor SEA CREATURES ARE LAND ANIMALS/ENTITIES. Their study reveals the Fante cultural conceptualisation that every sea animal has its land entity or counterpart. While this mapping of sea creatures to land animals in Fante may not be exclusive to the Fante language, the study obviously highlights the role of metaphors as far as naming practices or strategies are concerned. Metaphors, therefore, have a place in onomastics, revealing the pervasive nature of metaphors and the human mind.

Another closely related Akan language to Fante is Nzema. Nzema also employs conceptual metaphors in everyday expressions. Yakub (2019) conducted a cognitive-conceptual metaphorical analysis of the animal proverbs in Nzema. According to Yakub's (2019:175) findings, "both domestic and non-domestic animals including birds, flies, insects, and reptiles are deployed in Nzema proverbs to advise people against undesirable attitudes like recalcitrance, procrastination...and all sorts of social vices." Yakub (2019) identifies such metaphorical mapping as sheep representing one who does what is right; putting medication on a dog's nostril to performing a difficult task; a cat to a leader; a mouse to a subordinate etc. Yakub's (2019) study revealed the role of animal metaphors in Nzema proverbs and shows that the use of metaphors could embrace just any topic. It is obvious that the animal metaphors start with the mapping of the physical to another physical or an abstract entity. The present paper's focus is on the unseen, the abstract human mind.

With regard to Ewe, scholars have done some exploration of the metaphorical richness embedded in Ewe everyday discourse. While not specifically on expressions about the mind, there are a handful of studies that unearth the cultural as well as metaphorical significance of some Ewe expressions. One of such is Ameka (2002) who explored Ewe cultural scripting of jealousy and its related emotions in Ewe. He argued that jealousy and its related emotions in Ewe are expressed through both the physical eye and a psychologised eye, the latter of which is cognitive. Ameka (2002) argued further that expressing jealousy and envy has culturally specific nuances. An example of such nuances is that among the Ewe one's eyes are said to be red when one is envious or jealous of someone. In Masaai, on another hand, one's eyes are black when one experiences envy. These differences can be further understood by the symbolic meaning of the colours associated with the expression of envy. The point is clear that culture constructs our day-to-day expressions about just any given topic. Moreover, the fact that such emotions as envy having locus of a particular body part is a way of concretising them in language as they are conceived in the mind. In a related study, Amenorvi (2024b) investigated metaphorical expressions of anger, fear, happiness, and love, identifying ontological metaphors that concretise emotions through imagery such as fire, clothing, and possession. These metaphors reflect embodied experience and cultural values, and highlight the

challenges of translation and cross-cultural interpretation. The study affirms that emotions in Ewe are not only felt; they are also linguistically and culturally constructed.

Like Ameka (2002), Sevor (2019) offered a linguistic analysis of Ewe metaphorical expressions in domains such as time, death, and sensation, demonstrating how embodied experience informs linguistic structure. Her work reveals that time is metaphorically framed as a possession, a container, and a moving object, while sensations such as pain and sleep are rendered as substances or agents. Amenorvi (2024a) extends this inquiry by examining cultural metaphors of death in some Ewe proverbs, identifying metaphorical domains such as household items, animals, and traditional ways of life. These metaphors reflect ancestral values, moral legacies, and spiritual beliefs, and affirm the role of metaphor in encoding historical memory and cultural continuity. In that study, Amenorvi (2024a) unearthed such mappings as DEATH IS A FARM TOOL, DEATH IS A WATCH, DEATH IS A CAT, DEATH IS A GOAT, and DEATH IS A SNAIL, revealing the multifaceted metaphorical conceptualisation of death among the Ewe.

Another study is that of Dor (2015) who explored conceptual metaphors and indigenous Ewe knowledge in the life and work of Hesino Vinoko Akpalu. Hesino Akpalu is to the Ewe what Shakespeare is to the English, a renowned poet and composer. One conceptual metaphor Dor (2015) identifies in Akpalu's composition stems from the very name Akpalu had given his songs. Akpalu called his songs *agoha* 'lit. velvet songs'. According to Dor (2015), this name is born from the Ewe indigenous knowledge of the *ago* 'velvet' cloth or material. The *ago* cloth is revered among the Ewe for its beauty, textual quality, monetary worth etc. It is conceived to be on top of the most expensive cloths and are worn by the rich and the important in the community around Akpalu's time. Akpalu, therefore, maps the value of the velvet cloth among the Ewe to his songs and thereby metaphorically transferring the *ago* 'velvet' qualities to his songs. This artistic use of a conceptual metaphor has made people perceive Akpalu's compositions as masterpieces. Even today, Akpalu's songs are used on special occasions, studied in schools and are explored in many scholarly studies for their social, linguistic, literary and historical values to the Ewe language and culture. Were his songs simply known by the Ewe word *hawo* for songs, perhaps Akpalu's compositions might not have received the attention they did then and do today. It shows that conceptual metaphors have their place as mental pictures in giving value or its lack thereof to things, ideas and concepts.

Together, these studies affirm the expressive and conceptual depth of Ewe, particularly in its use of metaphor to encode abstract domains such as death, emotion, and sensation. They also demonstrate the value of integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory with Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian, 2011, 2017), the latter of which emphasises the role of cultural schemas and collective memory in shaping metaphorical thought. However, despite this growing body of research, Ewe metaphorical expressions about the human mind remain underexplored. While mental states are central to everyday interaction and

cultural interpretation, their metaphorical framing in Ewe has yet to be systematically examined.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the types and nuances of metaphors employed in everyday Ewe expressions regarding the human mind. By examining both the structural patterns and the subtle cultural implications of these expressions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Ewe speakers linguistically construct and interpret mental states. It also affirms the importance of African languages in advancing metaphor theory and cultural linguistics and invites a rethinking of cognitive linguistic frameworks through the lens of indigenous epistemologies. Overall, this inquiry positions metaphor not only as a cognitive tool but also as a cultural resource, one that reflects the lived experience, moral imagination, and conceptual sophistication of Ewe-speaking communities.

3. Methodology

Data for this study were collected from a combination of naturalistic and elicited sources between November 2024 and March 2025 in the Aflao and Denu Ewe-speaking communities of the Volta Region, Ghana. Respondents were purposively selected to capture generational perspectives on language use. Twenty older generation native speakers of Ewe (11 men and 9 women), with whom the researcher had previously established relationships through earlier studies, participated. The oldest respondent was in his eighties and the youngest in her late sixties. This age group was chosen because older speakers are regarded as custodians of traditional expressions and cultural knowledge, making them particularly valuable for documenting metaphorical language about *susu* ‘the mind’. To complement these insights, younger speakers were also consulted informally to confirm the continued relevance and intelligibility of the expressions across generations.

Participants were asked to provide as many everyday Ewe expressions relating to *susu* ‘the mind’ as possible. Among the Ewe, such expressions typically revolve around words including *tame* ‘inside head’, *susu* ‘mind’, *tagbo* ‘near head’, *nugomesese* ‘understanding’, and *nunya* ‘knowledge/wisdom’. Collected data were verified by several other native speakers and cross-checked with five Ewe language experts and scholars to ensure accuracy.

Metaphorical expressions were identified and analysed using the three-stage procedure proposed by Group (2007) and extended by Steen (2011), namely, lexical identification, determining key linguistic expressions likely to be metaphorical; source-target mapping, establishing underlying conceptual metaphors; and cultural interpretation, situating metaphors within Ewe cultural schemas such as the interplay between heart and mind, communal wisdom, and moral reasoning.

To ensure interpretive rigour, inter-rater reliability was addressed through a structured process. Prior to coding, the language experts participated in a calibration exercise to align their understanding of the coding scheme. A subset of data was

independently coded and then compared, with discrepancies discussed until consensus was reached. Agreement levels were monitored through percentage agreement, thereby ensuring consistency in the categorisation and interpretation of metaphors. Selected participants were further consulted to confirm the semantic and cultural plausibility of the identified metaphors. Finally, the results are contextualised within broader typologies of metaphor in Ewe (Ameka, 2002; Amenorvi, 2024a, 2024b; Sevor, 2019).

4. Findings

The analysis of everyday Ewe expressions about the human mind revealed a rich inventory of metaphorical constructions. In total, 19 distinct metaphor types were identified, reflecting both ontological and orientational mappings. These metaphors provide insight into how Ewe speakers conceptualise cognition as a culturally embedded phenomenon. The identified metaphor types are as follows:

Orientalional metaphors

1. THE MIND IS DISTANCE
2. THE MIND IS FRONT/BACK
3. THE MIND IS DEPTH

Ontological metaphors

4. THE MIND IS TEMPERATURE
5. THE MIND IS LIFE/DEATH
6. THE MIND IS WEIGHT
7. THE MIND IS PURITY/DIRT
8. THE MIND IS AGE
9. THE MIND IS LIGHT/DARKNESS
10. THE MIND IS AWAKE/ASLEEP
11. THE MIND IS TURBULENCE/CALM
12. THE MIND IS A SUBSTANCE TO HAVE OR NOT
13. THE MIND IS SIZE
14. THE MIND IS MARRIAGE/DIVORCE
15. THE MIND IS SHARPNESS
16. THE MIND IS SPEED
17. THE MIND IS AN AMOUNT
18. THE MIND IS A DOOR
19. THE MIND IS SOMETHING SPOILT

These metaphors demonstrate that the Ewe conceptualisation of the mind is multidimensional, drawing on physical properties (distance, depth, weight), natural phenomena (temperature, turbulence), moral and social evaluations (purity/dirt, age, light/darkness), and states of consciousness (awake/asleep, life/death). Collectively, they highlight the cultural schemas by which cognition is understood, linking mental processes

to communal values such as wisdom, moral responsibility, and social maturity. By accentuating these findings, the study affirms that metaphors of the mind in Ewe are more than random linguistic embellishments; they constitute systematic cultural conceptualisations encoding indigenous epistemologies and enrich global metaphor theory.

5. Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the types of Ewe mind metaphors identified in this study, starting with the orientational ones followed by the ontological ones. **Table 1** presents a set of Ewe orientational mind metaphors.

Table 1: Some Ewe orientational metaphors about the mind

Type of Metaphor	Example
1. THE MIND IS DISTANCE	<i>Ame tsitsi-a yi ta-me vii.</i> person old-DEF go head-inside IDEO (lit. The old man has gone far into his head.) <i>E-fe susu dzo.</i> 3SG-POSS mind leave (lit. His mind is gone.)
2. THE MIND IS FRONT/BACK	<i>Me-bu-a ta-me yi ηgo o.</i> NEG-think-HAB head-inside go front NEG (lit. He does not think go front) <i>E-tsi megbe le susu me.</i> 3SG-remain back at mind POST (lit. He remains at the back in his mind.)
3. THE MIND IS DEPTH	<i>Nugɔmesese deto hiã le agbe-me.</i> understanding deep need at life-inside (Deep understanding is needed in life.) <i>Agbetɔ fe ta-me goglo ηutɔ.</i> human POSS head-inside deep very (The inside of the human head is very deep.)

Example 1 presents an orientational metaphor of distance where an old man is said to have gone far into his mind. The expression is similar to the English expression of being lost in one's thoughts. The Ewe ideophone *vii* is used to describe someone or something so far away that the person's figure is either blur or cannot be seen at all. That in mind, the expression relates the process of thinking to a journey of some distance, and the farther one goes, the deeper one's thoughts become. The second part of Example 1 presents another metaphor of distance where one's mind is said to be gone. This Ewe expression is equivalent to saying that one is absentminded, which itself has some idea of the mind not being with one.

Another orientational metaphor discovered among the Ewe is the front/back metaphor. Here one's mind is said to be either front (forward thinking) or back (backward thinking). In Example 2, one is said not to think *yi ngɔ* 'lit. go front/forward,' which means one does not have foresight. The reverse in Example 2b *Etsi megbe le susume* 'lit He/She remains at the back in his/her mind' presents the case of being 'at the back' in the mind. In Ewe, the expression *tsi megbe* can also mean to be late. Given that, the mind metaphor of one being late personifies the mind as someone whose appointment one misses by being late, ending in the lack of intelligence or wisdom as a consequence.

The third type of orientational metaphor identified from data is the metaphor of depth. Here, an individual's mind or understanding is considered deep or shallow, the former depicting one with insight and the latter one lacking insight. One interesting thing about this metaphor of depth is that data has revealed two types of depths with regard to the mind. One is *deto* 'lit has reached depth' and the other *goglo* 'very very deep'. *Goglo* is deeper than *deto*. When a pit is *deto* in Ewe it is deep but *goglo* goes further in depth than *deto*. As regards the mind, one whose mind *deto* has deep understanding. On the other hand, the one whose mind *goglo* is considered wicked or cruel. Wickedness or cruelty is, therefore, culturally constructed as a mental process with unreachable depth. *Goglo* is also used to describe such depths as the depth of the sea or water bodies among the Ewe. Drawing from that, if one's mind is compared to the depths of the sea or other water bodies, it means that the person is atrociously cruel.

5.1 Ewe ontological metaphors of the mind

Of the nineteen metaphors of the mind identified in the data, sixteen are ontological in nature. This distribution suggests that Ewe conceptualisations of the mind rely more heavily on ontological metaphors than on orientational ones, highlighting a tendency to frame mental processes in terms of entities, states, and relationships rather than spatial orientation. Let us begin with items on **Table 2** in which the mind is equated with temperature, life/death and weight.

Table 2: The mind as metaphors of temperature, depth, life/death, and weight

Type of Metaphor	Example
4. THE MIND IS TEMPERATURE	i. <i>Nye susu-me xɔ dzo.</i> 1SG mind-inside receive fire. (lit. The inside of my mind is hot.) ii. <i>Susu-me fa n-ε abe avu fe ɲɔti nu ene.</i> mind-inside cold DAT-3SG as dog POSS nose mouth as (lit. The inside of his mind is as cold as a dog's nose.)
5. THE MIND IS LIFE/DEATH	i. <i>Ta-gbɔ ku n-ε.</i> head-near die DAT-3SG (lit. His head is dead.) ii. <i>Susu gbagbe aɖe-e nye ma.</i> mind living some-FOC COP DIST (lit. That is some living mind.)
6. THE MIND IS WEIGHT	i. <i>Nye susu-me le hóyá.</i> 1SG mind-inside at IDEO (The inside of my mind is light.) ii. <i>Ɖevi-e gake e-fe susu kpe.</i> child-FOC but 3SG-POSS mind heavy (He is a child but his mind is heavy.)

Table 2 presents ontological metaphors of temperature, life/death and weight. Example 4i literally translates “The inside of my mind is hot.” Pragmatically, it means that one has a lot on their mind or that one is disturbed by many thoughts. The metaphoric heat is the many thoughts one is processing. Example 4ii contrasts Example 4i in that the metaphor now refers to the opposite of heat – coldness. Here the inside of one’s mind is said to be as

cold as a dog’s nose. To emphasise how cold a person’s mind is, a comparison is drawn against a dog’s nose. This comparison between the human mind and a dog’s nose is so pervasive among the Ewe that the researcher decided to explore whether the coldness assigned to a dog’s nose goes beyond folklore. The notion that a dog’s nose is cold is not merely anecdotal but supported by scientific evidence. Studies have shown that the hairless tip of a dog’s nose is significantly cooler than that of herbivores, a trait linked to enhanced thermal sensitivity (Bálint et al., 2020). This adaptation allows dogs to detect weak heat sources, such as warm-bodied prey, from a distance, suggesting a functional role beyond olfaction (Brown, 2020; Bálint et al., 2020). Some older Ewe native speakers argue that the comparison might have been born from the observation that a dog’s nose is always moist, suggesting that it must be cold. The Ewe mind metaphor “cold as a dog’s nose”, therefore, transcends folklore to reveal a nuanced interplay between cultural perception and biological function. While traditional usage may evoke emotional detachment or cognitive stillness, scientific insights into canine thermoreception complicate this reading, suggesting that “cold” may equally signal heightened sensitivity and alertness. Thus, the metaphor operates not only as a descriptor of mental inactivity but also as a site of conceptual tension, where cultural imagination and empirical reality converge to enrich our understanding of embodied cognition.

The cold mind metaphor shares the same meaning of lack of intelligence with Example 5i, where one’s head is said to be dead, equating the human mind to a living thing whose death renders it lifeless and its lacking intelligence thereof. Example 5ii presents the direct opposite of the human mind as living contrasting its state of being dead. *Susu gbagbe* literally means “living mind”. Its pragmatic meaning in Ewe is a brilliant idea or an excellent thought.

Following the metaphor of life/death is the metaphor of weight. This ontological metaphor considers the mind as a substantial entity possessing or lacking weight. One’s mind is either heavy or light. Example 6i presents the mind as being *hoya*, an Ewe ideophone used to describe something very light. For Example, a balloon or paper can be said to be *hoya*, because of its almost insignificant weight. If one’s mind is *hoya*, it means the one does not think deeply or act maturely. On the other hand, as shown in Example 6ii, if one’s mind *kpè* ‘heavy’, it means one thinks or acts maturely.

Table 3 presents another group of ontological Ewe mind metaphors, namely metaphors of purity/dirt, age, light/darkness and wake/sleep.

Table 3: The mind as metaphors of purity/dirt, age, light/darkness, wake/sleep

Type of Metaphor	Example
7. THE MIND IS PURITY/DIRT	<i>i. Dekakpui-a fe susu-me kɔ.</i> young.man-DEF POSS mind-inside neat (lit. The inside of the young man’s mind is neat.)

	ii. <i>Egbe viwo fe susu-me foḍi</i>, today child-PL POSS mind-inside dirty <i>gbegblẽ nya-wo ko-e le wo-si.</i> spoilt matter-PL only-FOC at 3PL-hand (lit. The mind of today's children are dirty; all they have are spoilt words,)
8. THE MIND IS AGE	i. <i>E-tsi le susu-me.</i> 3SG-old at mind-inside (lit. He is old inside his mind.) ii. <i>Ḍevi susu le e-si.</i> child mind at 3SG-hand (lit. He has a child's mind.)
9. THE MIND IS LIGHT/DARKNESS	<i>Gbevu ma-wo fe susu-me do.viviti.</i> hooligam DIST-PL POSS mind-inside dark (Inside the minds of those hooligans is dark.) <i>E-fe susu-me kɔ.</i> 3SG-POSS mind-inside neat (lit. The inside of his/her mind is neat.)
10. THE MIND IS AWAKE/ASLEEP	i. <i>Kofi fe susu dɔ-alɔ̃.</i> POSS mind sleep (Kofi's mind is asleep.) ii. <i>E-fe susu le ɲu.</i> 3SG-POSS mind at awake (His mind is awake.)

Example 7 presents two illustrations to demonstrate the metaphor of purity about the mind. Examples 7i and 7ii contrast 'neatness' and 'uncleanliness' of the mind. Example 7i literally means that spoilt words make the minds of today's children dirty. Generally, among the Ewe, when one's mind is said to be *kɔ* 'neat', it means one has positive thoughts. On

the other hand, when one's mind is *fodi* 'dirty', the person's mind has negative thoughts of whatever type, immorality being just one of such thoughts as Example 7ii illustrates. Example 8 presents the mind metaphor of age, contrasting being old in the mind with having a child's mind. Being old in the mind as in Example 9i suggests that one possesses wisdom and discernment and acts accordingly. On the other hand, having a child's mind or being young in the mind is similar to one described as being childish in English.

Example 9 is a metaphor of light compared with darkness. The example literally means that the minds of the hooligans in question is dark. When one's mind is said to *do viviti* 'is dark', it is the same as saying one's mind is dirty as we have discussed earlier. Another type of ontological metaphor in the data is that of awake/asleep. Here a person's mind is said to be awake or asleep, placing the consciousness of being awake before the unconsciousness of being asleep. Example 10i literally means Kofi's mind is asleep while 10ii says his mind is awake. A sleeping mind among the Ewe suggests lack of intelligence and not being able to respond reasonably to cognitive tasks as one normally would according to one's age. That way, if a pupil's mind is asleep (*do alɔ*), that pupil is not able to do well in school. On the other hand, if one's mind is awake (*le ɲu*), it means one's mind is not asleep in every sense of the opposite of Example 10i; the two examples are direct opposites.

Table 4 presents mind metaphors of turbulence /calm, marriage/divorce, have/have not, and size.

Table 4: The mind as metaphors of turbulence/calm, position, have/have not, size, marriage/divorce

Type of Metaphor	Example
11. THE MIND IS TURBULENCE/CALM	i. <i>Nye susu-me dze kɔ anyi.</i> 1SG mind-inside land neck down (The inside of my mind is calm.) ii. <i>Nye susu-me le klaklakla.</i> 1SG mind-inside at IDEO (The inside of my mind is klaklakla.)
12. THE MIND IS A SUBSTANCE (have/not have)	i. <i>E-gble nunya/susu de afe.</i> 3SG-leave wisdom/mind at house (He has left wisdom at home.) ii. <i>Nunya le e-si.</i> wisdom at 3SG-hand (He has wisdom.) iii. <i>Susu me-le e-si o.</i>

	mind NEG-AT 3SG-hand NEG (He does not have a mind.)
13. THE MIND IS SIZE	i. <i>Nunya adido-e, asi me-tu-n-ε o.</i> knowledge baobab-FOC hand NEG-meet-DAT-3SG NEG (Wisdom is a baobab, the arm cannot embrace it.) ii. <i>E-fe susu lolo/hoe</i> 3SG-POSS mind big/small. (His mind is big/small.)
14. THE MIND IS MARRIAGE/DIVORCE	i. <i>Nugomesese/nunya gbe Kudzo</i> Understanding/wisdom divorce <i>ta devi nu ko wò-wò-na</i> CONJ child thing only 3SG-do-HAB (Understanding/wisdom has divorced Kudzo, so he only does childish things.)

Examples 11i and 11ii contrast one's mind being calm with the other where the mind makes the ideophonic sound *klaklakla*. The metaphor of calmness presents a soundless mind while a disturbed mind produces the *klaklakla* sound. This same ideophone is used among the Ewe to describe a sound that an analogic wall clock makes, what is commonly referred to in English as tick-tock. In effect if one's mind does not make this sound, it means that one is not burdened with many thoughts. On the other hand, when one's mind is *klaklakla*, it means one has many thoughts to deal with.

Another mind metaphor found in the data is the **have** or **have-not** metaphor where the mind is conceived as a substantial thing one can have or not have. Examples 12i to 12iii illustrate this conception. Example 12i literally translates "He has left his mind/wisdom at home" to mean that the person does not act wisely. Example 12iii speaks to the idea that one does not have wisdom in their hand. The mind is, therefore, conceived as something substantial to be located in the hand. Example 13i is a popular Ewe proverb about the mind. Here is the metaphor of size where knowledge is compared with a baobab tree that no one could embrace. This metaphor emphasises the vastness of knowledge and the impossibility of one person to have it all.

Example 14 presents the mind metaphor of marriage/divorce. The Ewe expression *Nugomesese/nunya gbe Kudzo ta devi nu ko wòwona* conveys the idea that understanding or wisdom has divorced Kudzo, leaving him to act only in the manner of a child. The verb *gbe* ‘to divorce’ is central here, as it frames the relationship between a person and wisdom in terms of a marital union that can be dissolved. Wisdom is personified as a partner who once shared a bond with Kudzo but has now withdrawn, and the result of this separation is a regression in his behaviour. The metaphor dramatises the absence of wisdom by presenting it not as a simple lack but as an active rupture, a decisive break that carries consequences. Kudzo’s actions, described as those of a child, highlight the immaturity and irrationality that follow when wisdom is no longer one’s spouse, metaphorically speaking. In this way, the metaphor constructs cognition as a relational process; wisdom can join with a person to stabilise and guide them, or it can depart, leaving them diminished and incapable of mature judgment.

Let us now turn to the final table of this discussion to discuss the rest of the Ewe mind metaphors unearthed in this study. On **Table 5** are metaphors of sharpness, speed, amount and door.

Table 5: The mind as metaphors of sharpness/bluntness, speed, amount, and door

Type of Metaphor	Example
15. THE MIND IS SOMETHING SHARP/BLUNT	i. <i>E-fe ta-gbɔ/susu da.</i> 3SG-POSS head-near/mind sharp (His head/mind is sharp.) ii. <i>Devi ma yi tsitsi-e,</i> child DIST cutlass blunt-FOC <i>me-se-na nu gome o.</i> NEG-hear-HAB thing under NEG (That child is a blunt cutlass; he does not have understanding.)
16. THE MIND IS SOMETHING WITH OR WITHOUT SPEED	<i>Efe susu de-able.</i> 3SG-POSS mind walk.fast (His minds walks fast.)
17. THE MIND IS SOMETHING OF AMOUNT	<i>Nye susu sɔgbɔ, mega de fu na-m o.</i> 1SG mind many NEG-REP remove worry DAT-1SG NEG (My mind is many, don’t worry me.)

18. THE MIND IS A DOOR	i. <i>Kofi fe susu-me vu.</i> POSS mind-inside open (The inside of Kofi's mind is open.) ii. <i>E-fe ta-me do vɔ.</i> 3SG-POSS head-inside close door. (The inside of his mind has closed door.)
19. THE MIND IS SOMETHING SPOILT	i. <i>E-fe tagbo gblẽ; ewi</i> 3SG-POSS head spoil marijuana <i>nono-a va glo.</i> smoking-DEF come too.much (His head is spoilt; too much smoking of marijuana.) ii. <i>Kofi wu aɖavato,</i> more.than mad.person <i>ye me susu-me fafã.</i> 3SG POSS mind-inside rotten (Kofi is more than a mad person; the inside of his mind is rotten.)

Example 15i and 15ii present the mind as a sharp object. This expression is used to show that an individual is witty or clever. But as to exactly what the comparison is drawn to, Example 14ii provides the answer – a cutlass. In that metaphor, a sharp cutlass symbolises intelligence while a blunt one obviously represents lack of intelligence. There is also the mind metaphor of speed as shown in Example 16 where the mind is said to literally work fast, expressing the idea of speed of thought. Just as a person walking fast reaches a destination early or responds to a need in time, if one's mind 'walks fast' one could solve cognitive tasks very quickly. The mind is also conceived as something that can be large in number or not. Example 17 presents the mind as *sɔgbɔ* 'many/much'. The Ewe adjective *sɔgbɔ* is used for both count and non-count nouns. That way money can be *sɔgbɔ* 'much' while children can be *sɔgbɔ* 'many', both depicting amount or number. When the mind *sɔgbɔ*, therefore, one has a lot to think about.

Example 18i which presents Kofi's mind as being open is equivalent to the English expression of being openminded. Example 18ii projects the mind as a closed door. However, the meaning does not correspond to the opposite of the English *open-mindedness*. This nuance and others are discussed in the following section. The final item on Table 5 is

Example 19, where the mind is compared to something spoilt or rotten. Insanity and related mental problem are expressed in Ewe this way. Example 18i is taken from a discussion where a man is said to be behaving abnormally from his excessive use of marijuana. In Example 18ii, someone's mind is said to be rotten because he is acting like a mad person.

6. Some Peculiarities about the Ewe Mind Metaphors

Two nuances were identified in the Ewe mind metaphor data. First is that some of the metaphors, whether orientational or ontological, have direct opposite forms with equally direct opposite meanings. Examples are the front/back, life/death, purity/dirt and awake/sleep metaphors. If one's mind *yi ɲɔ* 'lit. go forward', it means the one has foresight. The direct opposite of *ɲɔ* 'front' is *megbe* 'back'. That way, if one's mind *tsi megbe* 'lit. remain back', that individual lacks foresight. Like the front/back mind metaphor, the purity/dirt ones are said as direct opposites with equally direct opposite meanings. In that regard, if one's mind *ko* 'clean', one's mind one has clean thoughts; on the other hand, if one's mind is said to be *fodi* 'dirty', one has unclean, immoral or other negative thoughts. Even the English equivalents of these expressions in themselves are metaphorical, reiterating Johnson and Lakoff (1980) that metaphors permeate all spheres of everyday discussions including those about the human mind.

The life/death Ewe mind metaphors also present opposite metaphors with corresponding opposite meanings. If one's mind is *gbagbe* 'alive', the one has brilliant ideas. On the other hand, if one's mind is said to be *ku* 'dead', the one lacks common sense, a direct opposite to a brilliant idea. These types of metaphors marking opposites with corresponding ones opposite in meaning are not farfetched as it is only natural that opposites have contrasting meanings. The next type of metaphors presents a more interesting nuance.

An interesting peculiarity of the Ewe mind metaphors are those that appear as direct opposites but not with opposite meanings. Examples are the open/close and hot/cold mind metaphors. The open/close metaphor is said in relation to a door. One's mind can be said to be *vu* 'open' and another's *do vo* 'close door'. The former corresponds to the English way of saying that one possesses an open mind. Among the Ewe, if one's *susu* 'mind' *do vo* 'close door', this is not lack of an open mind but that one is wicked or cruel. The same goes for the hot/cold mind metaphors in Ewe. When one's mind is said to *xɔ dzo* 'lit. receive/is hot', it means one is under mental stress out of a lot of thinking. On the other hand, when's one's mind is said to *fa* 'cold'; it does not mean that one is not under mental stress. It actually means one lacks intelligence. These metaphorical reversals reveal a culturally embedded logic where in some cases semantic opposition does not necessarily equate to conceptual contrast. In some Ewe cognition, therefore, metaphor encodes moral and intellectual judgments that defy surface-level binaries.

7. Cultural Significance of Ewe Mind Metaphors

The metaphors of the mind identified in this study, while reflecting patterns that may be found across languages, are deeply inflected by cultural nuances that shape their meaning

and resonance. Conceptual Metaphor Theory demonstrates that metaphors are grounded in embodied experience, and many of the Ewe metaphors such as those of distance, depth, temperature, and turbulence, draw on physical domains that are widely accessible to human cognition. However, Cultural Linguistics reminds us that metaphors are not only cognitive mappings but also cultural conceptualisations, shaped by communal schemas, collective memory, and social practices (Sharifian, 2011, 2017). In this sense, the Ewe metaphors of the mind illustrate how cognition is linguistically constructed through culturally specific models.

For instance, metaphors such as THE MIND IS MARRIAGE/DIVORCE or THE MIND IS AGE extend beyond universal embodied experiences to encode culturally salient institutions and values. While the general idea of “losing wisdom” or “becoming immature” may be cross-linguistically familiar, the Ewe framing through divorce or childhood highlights relational and social dimensions of cognition. Similarly, metaphors of purity/dirt and light/darkness not only describe mental clarity or confusion but also resonate with moral schemas that are culturally distributed. These examples demonstrate that metaphors of the mind are simultaneously universal in their reliance on embodied domains and culturally specific in their instantiation through local institutions, values, and moral orientations. The cultural significance of these metaphors lies in their ability to situate cognition within a broader social and moral space. They reveal that the Ewe mind is not conceptualised as an isolated faculty but as a relational and evaluative phenomenon, one that is negotiated through communal values and cultural schemas. This supports the claim in Cultural Linguistics that metaphors are repositories of cultural knowledge, encoding collective ways of knowing and moral imagination.

8. Conclusion

This study has shown that Ewe expressions about the human mind are richly metaphorical, drawing on a wide spectrum of orientational, experiential, and existential domains to encode cognitive and emotional states. The identification of nineteen metaphor types, including spatial oppositions such as front/back and thermal oppositions of heat/cold reveal a coherent metaphorical logic that is both linguistically systematic and culturally embedded. These metaphors shape conceptual frameworks, reflect indigenous epistemologies, and offer insight into how mental states are socially constructed and linguistically negotiated within Ewe-speaking communities.

The findings affirm that metaphors in Ewe are cognitive tools that organise experience and mediate understanding. The metaphors of distance, temperature, light, turbulence, and possession, among others, point to a dynamic interplay between physical experience and abstract thought, revealing that the Ewe language encodes mental states through embodied and culturally resonant schemas. These metaphorical conceptualisations provide a window into the Ewe worldview, where sanity and insanity are not binary absolutes but spatially and experientially situated conditions. This study contributes to the growing body of African cognitive linguistics and challenges the dominance of Euro-

American models in metaphor theory. It shows the need for culturally grounded approaches that recognise the diversity of metaphorical thought across languages and societies. Moreover, the study invites further comparative research across African languages, particularly in exploring how metaphor intersects with mental health discourse, social norms, and indigenous knowledge systems.

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A PHONOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF HIATUS IN NZEMA SYLLABIC SYSTEM

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Abstract

Hiatus is a phonological phenomenon in which two different vowels occur in a juxtaposition without an intervening consonant. This configuration is unacceptable in several languages, therefore, specific phonological strategies are required to break the cluster. Nzema does not readily permit adjacent hetero-syllabic vowels and thus employs strategies to resolve them. This paper examines how Nzema resolves vowel hiatus through epenthesis and coalescence. Data for the study were collected from four native speakers through interviews. The study dwells on Optimality Theory for the analysis. It finds that, in Nzema, coalesced vowels always preserve their [-high] and [-round] features in the resultant vowel. With respect to epenthesis, a consonant is triggered by an adjacent high vowel, which in turn spreads its feature to harmonise with the consonant, be it coronal or labial. This, however, occurs within individual words and not at the word boundary. This paper therefore, contributes to the limited existing literature on Nzema phonology and expands the discussion of unacceptable v-v sequences in general.

Keywords: Nzema, Hiatus, Coalescence, Epenthesis, Optimality Theory

1. Introduction

The paper is both descriptive and theoretical in nature. The descriptive part discusses how Nzema repairs unacceptable vowel sequence. The theoretical part argues for a formal analysis of the repair strategies within the purview of Optimality Theory (Prince & Smolensky 1993). In this paper, two of the several possible mechanisms Nzema uses to resolve vowel-vowel sequence in the language are discussed: glide epenthesis and vowel coalescence.

Hiatus is a hetero-syllabic sequence of adjacent vowels which constitutes a dispreferred configuration in many languages (Siptár 2005). Some languages prohibit hiatus altogether; others prevent some instances from arising by various means but let others surface or resolve them in some surface-phonological manner (Siptár 2005). The various ways by which hiatuses are avoided include elision of one or the other vowel, diphthong formation, glide formation, vowel coalescence, assimilation as well as epenthesis of a default consonant, capturing a 'floating' consonantal melody or the spread

of some (consonantal) melody from one of the vowel positions flanking the empty onset position (Siptár 2005).

Nzema, like some other languages, disallows vowel hiatus and naturally employs a number of strategies to avoid it. This is in connection with what Harris (2011:1600-1601) posits that, “vowel sequences lacking an intervening consonant are cross-linguistically dispreferred, and wherever morphemes concatenation threatens to create a hiatus configuration of this sort, languages can take various measures to resolve it.” The current paper discusses consonant epenthesis and vowel coalescence as hiatus interrupters in Nzema.

1.1 The Nzema Language and its Speakers

Nzema is a Volta-Comoe (or Southern Bia) language of the Niger-Congo language Phylum within the Kwa language family spoken mainly in the southwestern part of Ghana and some parts of the La Côte d'Ivoire both in West Africa. It consists of five main dialects namely; Dwɔmɔlɔ (Nzema West), ɛlɛmgbɛlɛ (Nzema Central), ɛvalɔɛ, Egila and Adwɔmɔlɔ (Nzema East). The language, the people and the place are called Nzema (Annan 1980a; Nyame 2019). Nzema is also categorized under Atlantic-Congo, Nyo, Potou-Tano, Tano and Central Bia language groups (Eberhard, Gary & Charles 2018).

Nzema is located at the southwestern part of Ghana. It is bordered to the West by La Côte d'Ivoire (also known as the Ivory Coast), to the East by the Ahanta, to the North by Aowin (or Anyi) and Wassa and to the South by the Gulf of Guinea. Some of the Nzema speaking communities in Ivory Coast include: Apolonu, Maama, Agyekɛ, Mouah (Mowa), Ngyeme, Noi (Noe), Akpanye, Anzeasawu, Manvea (Mafia), Bassam, Kakusuazo, Kpɔkɛti, Poso (Border town), Asue, Nzɔbɛnu, Mgbɔsɛya and Eboko, and Bassam (also known as Grand Bassam) (Nyame 2019).

According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2021), the population of Nzema speakers (in Ghana) totaled 342, 090. The language is studied as a subject at all levels of education in Ghana, including the tertiary level. Nzema is also used for radio and TV broadcasting programmes, particularly on the radio stations of Nzema. It is also used in adult education programmes and as a result, has caused an increase in the number of publications in the language. Nzema, as it is called today, was not called Nzema (Annan 1980a; Aboagye 1992). The historical account of the origin of the Nzema people dates back to the early 2000 BC. The people (Nzema) initially, were called 'Kɔtɔkɔ' as they are affectionately called Nzema Kɔtɔkɔ today. The 'Kɔtɔkɔ' of Nzema is not however the same as that of the Asante of the Akan. The porcupine represents the Nzema 'Kɔtɔkɔ' while hedgehog is for the Akan (Annan 1980a).

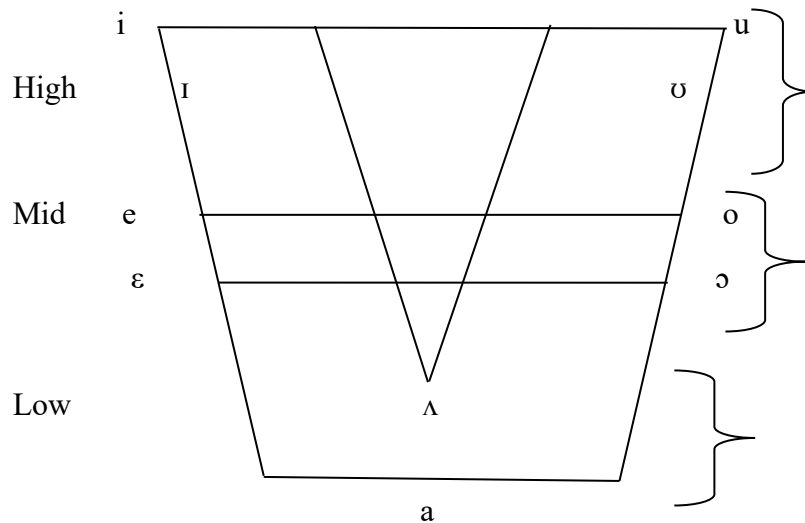
Traditionally, Nzema is divided into five states; Dwɔmɔlɔ, ɛlɛmgbɛlɛ, ɛvalɔɛ, Egila and Adwɔmɔlɔ (Aboagye 1992). Annan (1980) reports that, the Ahanta were part of Nzema and so were called Nzema-Ahanta. This is not surprising as languages that share borders with Nzema are mostly Volta-Comoe languages; Eboloza, Wasa, Aowin, Ahanta, Sehwi and Anyi of the La Côte d'Ivoire.

1.2 The sound system of Nzema

Scholars of Nzema phonology such as Essuah (1965) and Annan (1980b) both report that there are seven (7) vowel symbols, namely a, ɛ, e, i, ɔ, o and u which are used for writing. Nyame (2019) posits that Nzema has ten (10) oral vowels and six (6) nasal vowels

making it a total of sixteen (16) vowels in the language. The nasal vowels are; [ã, ã̃, ã̄, ã̅, ã̆]. The oral vowels are; [a, ɛ, e, ɪ, i, ɔ, o, ʊ, ʌ, u]. Among the ten oral vowels, with the exception of [ʌ] which is only phonetic, the remaining nine are both phonetic and phonemic. Nine of these oral vowels, [a, ɛ, ɪ, i, ɔ, ʊ, ʌ, u], can be nasalized while one [o] cannot be nasalized in any environment. The figure below shows the ten oral vowels of Nzema.

Figure 1: Nzema Vowel Chart



Nyame (2019)

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 surveys some hiatus resolution strategies discussed in the literature. Section 3 is the methodology. Section 4 provides a brief review of Optimality Theory. Section 5 provides generalizations as to how vowel hiatus is repaired through epenthesis and coalescence and then analyses the observed generalizations within the purview of Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky 1993).

2. Literature Review

There are several strategies by which languages deal with sequences of vowels that arise through morphological or syntactic concatenation. According to Casali (1996, 1997), one such strategy is to leave the sequence unchanged and syllabify the two vowels into separate syllables, a process he refers to as hetero-syllabification. Indeed, many languages do not readily tolerate adjacent hetero-syllabic vowels; for instance, Ndebele (Sabao, 2015), Igbo (Mba 2011), and others such as Nguni (Sibanda 2009) and Ganda (Haris 2011) strongly disprefer them. Languages which do tolerate vowel sequence may subject it to any one of the several possible hiatus resolution strategies which include syllabifying the two vowels into the nucleus of a single syllable (Diphthong Formation), Epenthesis of a default consonant sharing common feature(s) in place or manner with the vowels it is going to interrupt, Vowel Elision, Glide Formation (a process in which the first of two adjacent vowels surfaces as a semivowel), and Coalescence (a process in which an underlying V_1 and V_2 sequence is realized as a third vowel, V_3 sharing features of both V_1 and V_2). It is also referred to technically as Fusion (Hout 2015). Some languages also resort to

assimilation; Igbo (Mba 2011), secondary articulation; Ndau (Mutonga 2017), etc. Some of these hiatus resolution strategies are discussed as follows.

2.1 Hetero-syllabification

Hetero-syllabification means vowels that are in sequence should be syllabified into their respective, independent syllables. Casali (1996) explains that most languages in which vowel sequences are tolerated do so by means of segmenting the vowels into separate syllables. With this, though the vowels are in sequence, they are independent. Casali (1996:1) provides the examples in (1) below as the process of hetero-syllabification and uses data from the English language to illustrate.

Hetero-syllabification: $CV_1+V_2 > .CV_1 .V_2$

1

UR		SR	Gloss
a. ple insaid	→	[.ple.in.said.]	‘play inside’
b. go əwe	→	[.go.ə.we.]	‘go away’

Casali (1996: 1)

In the English example (1) above, we observe that whenever there is a vowel sequence at word boundary, the vowels are put into separate syllables. This situation may not hold cross-linguistically, as some languages consistently syllabify word-internal vowels into respective syllables. Eegimaa (Bassene 2012), Nzema (Annan 1980b) and Akan (Dolphyne 2006) are just a few examples of such languages. Let us consider the examples below.

2 Eegimaa

UR		SR	Gloss
a. /ε- <i>ap</i> /	→	[ε. <i>aɸ</i>]	‘forge (iron)’
b. /ε- <i>at</i> /	→	[ε. <i>at</i>]	‘type of shrine’
c. /fi- <i>εp</i> /	→	[fi. <i>εp</i>]	‘month, moon’

3 Nzema

a. / <i>debie</i> /	→	[<i>de.bi.e</i>]	‘something’
b. / <i>dua</i> /	→	[<i>du.ɔ</i>]	‘to plant’
c. / <i>aleεabo</i> /	→	[<i>a.li.ε.a.bv</i>]	‘universe’

4 Akan

a. / <i>abaa</i> /	→	[<i>a.ba.a</i>]	‘a stick’
b. / <i>abɔa</i> /	→	[<i>a.bɔ.a</i>]	‘an animal’
c. / <i>owuo</i> /	→	[<i>o.wu.o</i>]	‘death’

Comparing examples (1), (2), (3) and (4), we see that in (1), vowels at word boundaries are usually syllabified into separate syllables. In (2), (3) and (4), however, syllabification does not occur at word boundaries but word-internally. This is because in many languages just as in Nzema, vowels that are in sequence in words are independent and as such are separate syllables within the words.

In Nyame (2017), the author indicated that hetero-syllabification is an active discourse or vocalic hiatus resolution strategy in Nzema. This strategy is, however, neither a vocalic nor a consonantal hiatus resolution strategy in Nzema as was asserted in Nyame (2017). The present knowledge of hetero-syllabification, therefore, contradicts Nyame's (2017) assertion. Nyame (2017) only focuses on vowel elision and glide epenthesis and emphasises that these are the only mechanisms for breaking unacceptable vowel-vowel clusters in the language. Furthermore, epenthesis of the labial-velar glide /w/, is also discussed in Nyame (2017) that it is as a result of the sequence of /uʌ/. Another sequence, which also triggers epenthesis of /w/, which is /ua/, is, however, not mentioned. Clear explanations are also not given to account for epenthesis of the consonants, /w/ and /j/ that are used for epenthetic purposes in the language. This, perhaps, may be a result of wrong constraints used. For instance, *DIPH, a faithfulness constraint which penalises diphthongs, is ranked over all other constraints in Nyame (2017). Additionally, ONSET, which is a mild requirement for consonant epenthesis in the language, particularly in slow and emphatic speeches, is ranked high in Nyame (2017) to imply that ONSET is a strict requirement. These and other observations provide a good reason for a second look into how Nzema resolves sequence of vowels in the language. The present study draws on enough data to provide a detailed theoretical account of glide epenthesis and also examines other means through which Nzema resolves hiatus.

2.2 Diphthong Formation (Diphthongization)

Some sequences of vowels (usually two) function as a single sound. Such a combination of vowels that yields a single sound is what is technically referred to as a diphthong (Yule 2010, Hayes 2009). Diphthong formation is one of the means for resolving hiatus in many languages.

Casali (1996) presents the following as the basic form diphthong formation takes universally:

$CV_1 + V_2 > .CV_1 V_2$.

He explains that some languages avoid hiatus by retaining both vowels and syllabify them into the nucleus of a single syllable. A language like Ngiti resolves hiatus via diphthong formation (Kutsch Lojenda 1994: 90-91). Consider the example in (5) below.

5 Diphthong Formation in Ngiti (Kutsch Lojenda 1994)

UR		SR	Gloss
a. /abvo àji/	→	[a.bvoà.ji]	'window'
b. /opi àji/	→	[o.pià.ji]	'Lendu woman'
c. /indrí akpà/	→	[in.drí.a.kpà]	'male goat'

Kutsch Lojenga (1994) states that, "both vowels must be realised as a short complex vowel nucleus on one V timing slot." She, however, admits that the first vowel in every sequence is shorter in duration than the second vowel. It appears, therefore, that for every possible resolution strategy to work in a particular language as far as vowels are concerned, the

featural properties of the vowels also count. Diphthong formation is not yet attested in Nzema as far as the current literature on Nzema is concerned. This is because in Nzema every vowel is a syllable on its own (see example 3).

2.3 Consonant Epenthesis

Languages that resolve hiatus through consonant epenthesis differ in the kind of consonants that function epenthetically as hiatus interrupters. According to Casali (2011:3), three possibilities that are well attested include; a semivowel, usually one that is homorganic with (that is, one that shares the same frontness or roundness as) the first or the second vowel, a glottal stop ([ʔ]) or fricative ([h]) or coronal consonant, generally [t] or a rhotic. Vaux (2001), however, thinks otherwise. Vaux (ibid) explains that epenthesis of a default consonant is language specific. I agree with Vaux's (2001) submission in that, though languages in the world draw their grammar from one major source (Universal Grammar) (Kager 1999), the type of consonant that a language will select may be different from another. An example is the (isi)Ndebele language in which labial consonant, /b/ epenthesis is regular at preposition – noun boundary (Sabao 2015), as shown in (6).

6 Epenthesis in Ndebele (Sabao, 2015)

UR	SR	Gloss
a. /la-o-mama/	→ [labomama]	‘with mothers’
b. /la-o-mangoye/	→ [labomangoye]	‘with cats’

Sabao (2015) explains that, the trigger for /b/ epenthesis is the back mid vowel [o] which is also a plural affix. Sabao (ibid), however, does not explain in detail the reason for the labial /b/ epenthesis and not any other consonant. As already mentioned, epenthesis of a consonant of any kind must share common feature(s) either in frontness or roundness with the first vowel (Casali 1996). From the Ndebele example in (6) however, the vowel that shares feature with /b/ is /o/ which is the second vowel and not /a/, the first vowel. Even though /o/ and /b/ differ in roundness, they are both [labial]. It is this feature that makes it possible for /b/ to interrupt between /a/ and /o/ to resolve the hiatus created. This also suggests that it is not always the case that an epenthetic consonant will necessarily have to agree in feature with the first vowel and that the feature should be either frontness or roundness as Casali (1996) posited.

In Nzema, the consonants that are used as hiatus interrupters do actually share same frontness and roundness as the vowels (usually the first vowel as stated in (Casali, 1996)). If the first vowel is either of the specifications [+round] or [-round], the consonant to epenthesize assumes same feature. Thus, [j], which is a front high unrounded approximant, is the consonant counterpart of [i], a front high unrounded vowel. Likewise, [w], a labial-velar central approximant which is also a back high rounded glide, the counterpart is [u]. Moreover, in Nzema, it is not only [i] and [u] that trigger epenthesis of [j] and [w] but also [ɪ] and [ʊ], respectively, as in example (7) below.

7 Nzema (Environment for epenthesis of [j] and [w])

UR	SR	Gloss
a. /sua/	→ [suwʌ]	‘house’
b. /soa/	→ [sowa]	‘carry’
c. /tia/	→ [tijʌ]	‘walk’
d. /tea/	→ [tja]	‘shout’

In (7), we observe that both [u] and [ʊ] which are back high vowels trigger [w] epenthesis and not only [u] as asserted earlier in Nyame (2017). The same way [i] and [ɪ] trigger epenthesis of [j] as both are front unrounded high vowels.

2.4 Vowel Elision

Elision or deletion is basically a situation where sounds disappear or are not articulated in certain contexts (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin 1996). This suggests that a sound that is present in its underlying form can be removed in the surface form in certain environments.

Matthews (1997) defines vowel elision as the process by which a vowel at the end of a word is lost, or elided before another vowel at the beginning of a word that follows. This definition agrees with that given by Casali (1997) and Rosenthal (1997). However, it appears to exclude other instances of elision by focusing solely on first vowel that is, (V₁) elision. Indeed, there are languages in which elision always targets the leftmost vowel. Nguni (Sibanda 2009) is one of these languages, as shown in (8).

8 Vowel elision as hiatus resolution in Nguni (Sibanda 2009)

UR	SR	Gloss
a. /ba-onke/	→ [bonke]	‘all’
b. /ba-odwa/	→ [bodwa]	‘only them, alone’
c. /ibe-ihamba/	→ [ibihamba]	‘it was going’
d. /ube-uhamba/	→ [ubuhamba]	‘you were going’

In (8) above, we see that the target of elision is not subject to whether the vowel is low or high. The target is always the leftmost of the two vowels, V₁. In Akan for instance, leftmost and rightmost vowel elision occur (Amoh 2017). Consider the example in (9) below.

9 Vowel elision as hiatus resolution in Akan (Amoh 2017)

	UR	SR	Gloss
a.	<i>/efie/</i> house/home	+ <i>/owura/</i> → <i>/efiewura/</i> owner	‘landlord/landlady’
b.	<i>/aboa/</i> animal	+ <i>/efunu/</i> → <i>/aboæfunu/</i> carcass	‘dead animal’

The Akan examples in (9) above demonstrate that vowel elision is not always in the prerogative of V₁ as Rosenthal (1997), Mathews (1997) and Casali (1997) posit but also V₂. In examples (8) and (9), the environment for elision is between morpheme and word boundaries. Elision, however, occurs word-internally too and as such, does not only affect vowels but also syllables. The Nzema examples in (10) and Ganda in (11) are presented below to demonstrate this assertion.

10 Syllable elision in Nzema

	UR	SR	Gloss
a.	<i>/abɛbɛ/</i>	<i>[a:bɛ]</i>	'locust'
b.	<i>/abubura/</i>	<i>[a:bura]</i>	'a lame person'
c.	<i>/awuko/</i>	<i>[a:ko]</i>	'abode'

In (10), a whole syllable is deleted and it is compensated by lengthening the initial vowel. With this, pronunciation is made easy for the Nzema native speakers. This is in line with Harris's (2011) argument that, the phenomenon is language specific and that some of the lost morphemes are compensated with a lengthening as also in Ganda below.

11 Vowel elision as hiatus resolution in Ganda (Harris 2011)

	UR	SR	Gloss
a.	<i>/Ba-ezi/</i>	<i>[be:zi]</i>	'sweepers'
b.	<i>/Ba-ogezi/</i>	<i>[bo:gezi]</i>	'speakers'

In (11), the lost sounds involve low vowels, but in Nzema (10), it involves syllables with non-low vowels.

Gimson (1970) explains that, apart from word-internal elisions, sounds may be elided in rapid colloquial speech, especially at or in the vicinity of word boundaries. This also suggests that languages in which elision is frequent, the phenomenon is unavoidable particularly for native speakers. In normal speech, speakers tend to leave some sounds unpronounced which is neither as a result of laziness nor a form of sloppiness. Thus, deliberately avoiding the regular patterns of elision in discourse usually results in artificial talk (Yule 2010). In this sense, elision can be seen as a linguistic criterion that distinguishes a native speaker from a non-native speaker.

2.5 Coalescence

Another attested hiatus resolution strategy is coalescence. Some scholars refer to it as fusion (Hout 2015). That is, the merger of two sounds to yield a third sound that shares feature(s) of both sounds. Casali (1996) explains coalescence with the following structure:

$$CV_1 + V_2 > V_3.$$

Based on Casali's (1996) description, the resulting sound of coalesced underlying sounds should surface as a different sound, but one that shares similar features with those sounds. For example, in Ciyao, where V_1 is low and V_2 is mid or high, the resulting vowel is always mid, with backness and roundness of the resulting vowel agreeing with those features of V_2 (Ngunga 2000; cited in Tanner 2007).

12 Coalescence as hiatus resolution in Ciyao (Ngunga 2000)

	UR	SR	Gloss
a	/a + i/ → [e:]		
	/ma-ísó/ → [mé:só]		'eyes'
b	/a + u/ → [o:]		
	/ma-úngu/ → [mó:ngu]		'pumpkins'
	/ma-úvǎ/ → [mó:vǎ]		'days'
c	/a + e/ → [e:]		
	/ga-éswé:lǎ/ → [gé:swé:lǎ]		'white'
d	/a + o/ → [o:]		
	/ma-óla/ → [mó:la]		'frogs'

From (12), it is observe that both [+low] and [+high] and [+low] and [-high] merger respectively result in a [-high] vowel. Though the resulting (third) vowel is a mid-vowel, it shares features with the first and second vowels. That is to say, in examples (12a) and (12c), the third vowel shares the feature [-high] with the first vowel. It also shares [-round] feature with the first and second vowels. In (12b) and (12d), however, the third vowel shares the feature [-high] with the first vowel and shares the feature [+round] with the second vowel. This is in line with what Casali (1996) describes as height coalescence. He explains that /a+i/ coalesce to /e/, and /a+u/ to /o/. In Ciyao, as we can see from the examples in (12), it is not only /a+i/ and /a+u/ coalescence that result in /e/ and /o/ respectively, but also /a+e/ and /a+o/. This is because /i/ and /e/ share same frontness while /o/ and /u/ share same backness and roundness. Notwithstanding, (12c) and (12d) clearly display V_1 elision more than classical coalescence. The examples from Nguni (Sibanda 2009) shown in (13) display a true instance of coalescence.

13 Coalescence in Nguni

UR	SR	Gloss
a. /a+isi/	→ [esi]	‘the big chair’
b. /a+ulu/	→ [olu]	‘the long stick’
c. /la+inja/	→ [lenja]	‘and/with the dog’
d. /la+umuntu/	[lomuntu]	‘and/with the person’

As can be seen in (13), coalescence occurs in Nguni when the vowel /a/ is followed by /i/ or /u/ resulting in /e/ or /o/, respectively. The resulting vowel [e] shares the feature [-round] with the underlying vowels /a/ and /i/. The reverse is what we see in (13b) and (13d). An important observation is that the resultant vowels which are both [-high] are however [+ATR]. Examples (13a) and (13c) fit Casali’s (1996) description of a canonical height coalescence of the type belonging to e-Coalescence.

2.6 Assimilation

Assimilation as a hiatus resolution strategy is not well examined cross-linguistically; however, it occurs in some languages. Among the ninety-two (92) languages surveyed by Casali (1996) in respect of hiatus resolution strategies, assimilation was not reported on.

Mba (2011) explains the phenomenon as a phonological process by which one sound becomes more like a nearby sound. She adds that this occurs regularly in rapid speech either at word boundary or word-internally. In vowel assimilation, one vowel sound becomes more like the other or assumes some feature of an adjacent vowel. In Igbo, apart from vowel elision which is a major hiatus resolution strategy, vowel assimilation is another means of resolving hiatus in the language (Mba 2011). Consider the examples in (14).

14 Assimilation as hiatus resolution in Igbo (Mba 2011)

UR	SR	Gloss
a. <i>ulo + elu</i>	= <i>uleelu</i>	‘storey building’
b. <i>ùdé + ísí</i>	= <i>údíísí</i>	‘hair pomade’
c. <i>ódụ + águ</i>	= <i>ódáágu</i>	‘tiger’s tail’
d. <i>àkpà + égó</i>	= <i>àkpéégó</i>	‘bag of money’

The examples in (14) show a regressive assimilation in which V₁ is influenced to take features of V₂. In this respect, V₂ becomes long which is taken as a single vowel and not two vowels in sequence. There are also instances of progressive assimilation in Igbo (Mba 2011). Both progressive and regressive assimilation also occur in Hiroshima Japanese as hiatus resolution strategies (Shigeto & Yurie 2008).

3. Methodology

Data for the study were collected from ten native speakers; five males and five females who are also teachers of the Nzema language. Their ages range between forty and sixty. The data were gathered from three towns; Half Assini, Tikobo 1 and Menzezo in the Western and Central Nzema, where the consultants live and teach. Semi-structured interviews were used to illicit responses from them. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transferred onto a computer. The recordings were then transcribed. Concatenations involving vowel-vowel sequence that showed were selected and assigned their various glosses and translations. The analysis is carried out within Optimality Theory.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Optimality Theory

This study is analysed within Optimality Theory (henceforth OT). OT, which was first proposed by Prince & Smolensky (1993), is a constraint-based linguistic theory and has mainly developed in the field of generative phonology. It is a theory of the grammar of human language, which holds that every grammar is a system of conflicting forces. These ‘forces’ are represented by constraints, each of which makes a requirement about some aspect of grammatical output forms (Kager 1999). In other words, OT defines and shows how unique the grammar of one language is from another. It does this through ranking of constraints that are said to be in conflicts. Whereas the set of constraints is universal, their hierarchies are different across languages. These OT constraints are not inviolable: a violation of a constraint is tolerated if it is necessary to satisfy another constraint that is ranked higher. Any systematic variation in human language is derived from the interaction among universal constraints.

OT is different from earlier generative models such as the Declarative Phonology which posits that constraints are ‘hard’ and inviolable (Bird 1990, Scobbie 1991). OT on the other hand assumes constraints to be violable and it is a theory of constraint interaction independent of what the constraints are (Dresher 1996). According to Kager (1999:18-19), “It is an input-output mechanism that pairs an output form to an input form (such that each input has precisely one output)”.

In OT, optimal candidates are not necessarily flawless as they may incur at least the least costly violations in a given language. Kager (1999) notes that violation of a constraint is not a direct cause of ungrammaticality, nor is absolute dissatisfaction of all constraints essential to the grammar’s outputs. Instead, what determines the best output of a grammar is the least costly violation of the constraints. Constraints though universal, may be ranked differently from one language to the other. That is to say, ranking of constraints is subject to language specific grammar and it is this hierarchical way of looking at the constraints that finally produce the desired optimal candidate. The study adopts this framework because of its many advantages for morphophonological analysis.

5. Data presentation and discussion

This section discusses the repair strategies that speakers employ for hiatus resolution in Nzema. In his previous study, Nyame (2017) briefly discussed vowel elision, consonant epenthesis and hetero-syllabification. In the present study, an alternative analysis to hetero-syllabification as a hiatus resolution strategy in Nzema is provided. Moreover, coalescence and epenthesis are discussed in detail. Therefore, the mechanisms for hiatus resolution that would be discussed in this paper include consonant epenthesis and vowel coalescence. The available data for the Optimality analysis are based on these strategies as they are frequently used for resolving hiatus in Nzema. This section, therefore, explores these strategies by bringing to light how sequences of vowels are resolved in Nzema through consonant epenthesis and vowel coalescence.

5.1 Consonant epenthesis in Nzema

Hayes (2009:14) argues, “It is fairly common for languages to resolve high-vowel hiatus by inserting a glide that is homorganic (shares the same place of articulation) with one of the two adjacent vowels”. Epenthesis of the palatal [j] and labial-velar [w] glides is discussed in this subsection.

5.1.1 Epenthesis of [w]

Epenthesis of [w] is realised in the environment where a vowel following a consonant in a word (or syllable) has the feature [labial] and [+high]. Example (15) demonstrates epenthesis of the labial-velar [w].

15

	UR	SR	Gloss
a.	/sòà/	[sʷòwà]	‘send’
b.	/mòà/	[mʷòwà]	‘far place’
c.	/súà/	[sʷúwà]	‘house’
d.	/bòàni/	[bʷòwàni]	‘sheep’
e.	/túà/	[tʷúwà]	‘pay’
f.	/kúà/	[kʷúwà]	‘gather’

Example (15) shows instances of consonant epenthesis. Although [w] has been inserted, the meanings of the lexical items remain unchanged. This is because the insertion of the glide has a discourse function, which is emphasis. This means that a true epenthesis will not render an item a different realization in Nzema. This phenomenon is also different from the canonical labialization where vowels that possess [labial] feature when preceded by consonants, influence the consonants that are originally non-labials to behave as labials.

Thus, in (15), /k/, /s/ and /t/ which are not labials gain the feature labial, [w]. Therefore, as can be seen in the examples above, the consonants on the left are usually affected, yet glide (semi-vowel) is inserted in that same word. What accounts for this is that the vowel which is the trigger for the epenthesis spreads its labial feature to the epenthetic site. Thus, the spreading is always from left to right as in the examples.

Moreover, the insertion of the epenthetic glide [w] enables onsetless syllables to have onsets, even though this is not a strict requirement in Nzema. This usually occurs (in the case of Nzema) when the initial vowel of two or more vowels in sequence has the feature [labial] and [+high]. In the environments discussed above, inserting a different segment other than [w] would render the lexical items meaningless. Consider example (16).

16	UR	SR
a.	/sòà/ ‘carry’	*[sʷ`oǵà]
b.	/mòà/ ‘to fold’	*[mʷ`oǵà]
c.	/súà/ ‘house’	*[sʷ`úǵà]

It is observed from (16a-c) that the meanings of the items are distorted. This means that inserting a segment in the wrong environment will create a distortion in meaning. It is seen that the initial vowels, V₁ are all [labial] and so do not share same feature with [j] in spite of the fact that they are both [+high].

5.1.2 Epenthesis of [j]

Epenthesis of [j] is realised in the environment where a vowel following a consonant in a word (or syllable) has the feature [cor] and [+high]. Consider the examples in (17).

17	UR	SR	Gloss
a.	/ʌzǵé/	[ʌzǵǵé]	‘sepulcher’
b.	/bíʌ/	[bíǵʌ]	‘to bathe’
c.	/teǵà/	[te`ǵǵà]	‘to bend’
d.	/bíé/	[bíǵé]	‘to urinate’
e.	/nǵà/	[n`ǵǵà]	‘to look’
f.	/tǵé/	[tǵǵé]	‘to listen’
g.	/àmgbǵě/	[à`mgb`ǵǵě]	‘a shell fish, mussel’

In contexts like example (16) and (17), Nzema epenthesize rather than syllabifying the vowel sequence into separate syllables. When this occurs, it satisfies a constraint in OT called ‘onset’. It can also be observed that, the epenthetic segment which is a semi-vowel is harmonic with V₁ (that is, it shares the same feature of frontness with V₁). However, this is a technique of breaking the cluster of vowels to avoid hiatus. The strategy of [w] and [j] epenthesis facilitates easy articulation in the Nzema language. It is also utilized for the purpose of emphasis.

5.2 Vowel coalescence in Nzema

Vowel coalescence is another strategy through which sequences of vowels are resolved in Nzema. Cross-linguistically, a true coalescence is either ε -coalescence or e-coalescence (Casali 1996). Casali (ibid) explains ε -coalescence as the merger of two different vowels which usually surface as / ε / and the contrary for e-coalescence. The examples in (18) show e-coalescence.

18

UR		SR	Gloss
a. / <i>bàkà</i> /	+ / <i>ébú</i> /	→ [<i>bàkébú</i>]	‘a stick has broken’
‘stick’	‘has broken’		
b. / <i>àwà</i> /	+ / <i>éfítí</i> /	→ [<i>àwéfítí</i>]	‘a bottle gourd has cracked open’
‘bottle gourd’	‘has cracked open’		
c. / <i>ànì ò mà</i> /	+ / <i>édú</i> /	→ [<i>ànì ò médú</i>]	‘a bird has flown’
‘bird’	‘has flown’		
d. / <i>bànà</i> /	+ / <i>éwíé</i> /	→ [<i>bànéwíé</i>]	‘plantain has finished’
‘plantain’	‘has finished’		

In (18), underlying /a+ ε / coalesce into /e/. This form of coalescence is e-Coalescence, which is usually uncommon. What we observe is that, both V₁ and V₂ that are [-ATR] coalesce into a [+ATR].

An alternative analysis can also account for the result in (18) where elision of V₁ feeds raising of V₂. Examples (18a) and (18b) are repeated in example (19) to show the alternative analysis.

19	UR		SR	Gloss
a.	/ <i>bàkà</i> /	+ / <i>ébú</i> /	→ [<i>bakɛbu</i>] → [<i>bàkébú</i>]	‘a stick has broken’
	‘stick’	‘has broken’		
b.	/ <i>àwà</i> /	+ / <i>éfítí</i> /	→ [<i>awɛfítí</i>] → [<i>àwéfítí</i>]	‘a bottle gourd has cracked open’
	‘bottle gourd’	‘has cracked open’		

In (19), it is observed that V₁ elision first apply before raising of V₂ to realize the output, V₃. Notwithstanding, the resultant [-high] vowel shares both [-high] and [-round] features with its V₁ and V₂. Observe also, the example (20) where a +ATR low vowel and a –ATR mid vowel coalesce into a +ATR mid vowel.

20	UR	SR	Gloss
a.	/èbí ʌ/ + /ɛwú/	→ [èbí.é.wú]	‘Ebia has died’
	‘name’	‘has died’	
b.	/sú ʌ/ + /ɛbú/	→ [sú.é.bú]	‘a building has collapsed’
	‘house’	‘has collapsed’	
c.	/gú ʌ/ + /ɛdú/	→ [gú.é.dú]	‘the market is closed’
	‘market’	‘has closed’	

From (20), it is seen that underlying /ʌ+ɛ/ merges into /e/. What is observed is that, both V₁ and V₂ which are [+ATR] and [-ATR], respectively coalesce into a [+ATR]. The resultant vowel thus shares the feature [+spread] of both V₁ and V₂.

It must be noted that in Nzema, coalescence of [+ATR] and [-ATR] low vowels, [ʌ, a], with [-ATR] mid vowel, [ɛ] respectively, always results into a [+ATR] mid vowel, [e]. As also noted by Casali (1996), the feature that is preserved in height coalescence generally is [-high]. However, e-coalescence, in which two [-ATR] vowels coalesce into a [+ATR] is not discussed in Casali (1996), and which is unique to Nzema.

An important observation made during the interviews with my consultants, which manifests in (20b) and (20c) is the fact that glide formation precedes coalescence. That is to say, the actual realizations appear to be [swebu] and [gwedu], respectively. In this case, multi-hiatus resolution which involves glide formation of the final vowel /u/ and coalescence of /ʌ+ɛ/ are seen to have taken place at the same time. This is not surprising as some languages in which the phenomenon is very frequent exhibit complex patterns of resolution (Casali 1996).

A question which may need a swift answer is whether or not the phonotactics of Nzema permit sequences such as /sw/ and /gw/. This question will require another study to answer it. However, since growth is a major feature of every language, this can be investigated in another study. Our interest for now is in the merger as a single pattern.

5.3 Consonant epenthesis in OT

As noted earlier, when it comes to which consonant can act as a hiatus interrupter, the choice is triggered by an adjacent high vowel. This adjacent high vowel then spreads its features (be it [cor] or [labial]) to the epenthetic site. In optimality-theoretic terms, epenthesis involves a violation of the faithfulness constraint, which is a result of the non-existence of the epenthetic segment in the input counterpart. This violation of the faithfulness constraint is mostly due to dominant syllable well-formedness constraints, such as Onset and No-Coda. In languages where there is constant epenthesis in output forms, because the input did not stay loyal or faithful to the output, it breaches the contract with the faithful constraint. However, if it is a strict requirement for syllables to have onsets, Faithfulness constraint will necessarily be dominated by Onset to enable onsetless syllables to have onsets.

In initial vowel utilizing languages such as Nzema, Onset may not be a strict requirement; the Onset First Principle in this regard will be a ‘weak’ one (Itô 1989). For instance, [àlɪ́-éàbɔ́] ‘universe’ will become [à.lɪ.ʔé.à.bɔ]; [éwɔ́lɛ́] ‘snake’, [é.wɔ.lɛ́]; [ʔlókó] ‘ripe plantain’, [ʔ.lókó]. In the examples given, we see that epenthesis of [j] occurs to break the cluster, [ɪ́] and [é], in the first example. However, the first and fourth syllables still do not have onsets. In the other examples, we see the initial onsetless syllables, ‘é’ and ‘ʔ’, surfacing in the outputs. This implies that in Nzema, both initial and medial onsetless syllables exist. Thus, syllables that may necessarily require onsets may not be as a result of imperfect matching as may be the case for some other languages. Consequently, Selkirk (1981) and Itô (1989) explain epenthetic segment as an empty structural position whose presence is required by a language-specific ‘syllable template’. This template defines whether or not an onset is obligatory, whether or not a coda is allowed.

In this model, epenthesis is driven by an imperfect match between input segments and the syllable template. An imperfect match may arise, for example, when the input contains a sequence of two vowels, without an intervening consonant, whereas the syllable template requires an obligatory onset. Syllabification then enforces the template by providing an empty onset position: one that is not filled by an input consonant. In the case of Nzema, however, as we saw from the discussions above, epenthesis of a segment is not always to address onsetless syllables, but also to fulfill a major speech function: emphasis. Thus, during slow and emphatic speeches, epenthesis becomes regular. This will therefore rule out Onset as an important constraint in the present analysis. The following constraints as used in Uffmann (2006) and Motte (2013) would be used in tableaux 1 and 2.

20 Constraints ranking: *VV >> *MULT(Dor) >> *MULT(Cor) >> *MULT(Lab) >> DEP(F)

The constraints are explained below:

*VV – there should not be vowel-vowel clusters

*MULT(Dor) – there should be no multiple dorsals

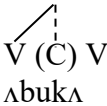
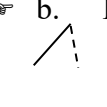
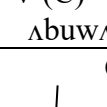
*MULT(Cor) – there should be no multiple coronals

*MULT(Lab) – there should be no multiple labials

DEP(F) – features in the output must have input correspondence (no insertion of a feature)

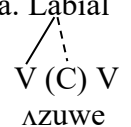
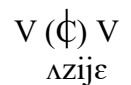
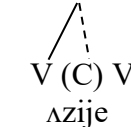
These constraints penalise any candidate that inserts unacceptable feature. This in effect, leads us to the very consonant that should be inserted. Consider the analysis in tableaux 1 and 2.

Tableau 1: Glide, [w] epenthesis

ΛbuΛ	*VV	*MULT (Dor)	*MULT (Cor)	*MULT (Lab)	DEP(F)
a. Dor  V (C) V ΛbukΛ		*!			*
b. Lab  V (C) V ΛbuwΛ				*	*
c. Cor  V (C) V ΛbujΛ				*	*
d. ΛbuΛ	*!				

As can be seen from tableau (1), candidates (a) and (d) are eliminated at an early stage of the competition due to the highly ranked constraints each violates. Candidate (a) violates a second highest-ranked constraint by inserting multiple dorsal /u, k/, which is fatal. Candidate (d) violates the first and most highly-ranked constraint by presenting vowel clusters /u, Λ/, which is also fatal. Candidates (b) and (c) survive at this stage. There are however other constraints to be satisfied or violated by candidates (b) and (c). Candidate (b) and candidate (c) violates two constraints each. However, candidate (b) performs better on the hierarchy than (c) in the sense that (c) inserts a dispreferred sound. At last, the competition is over and candidate (b) emerges the optimal because it has the best performance on the entire hierarchy, notwithstanding its violation of the lowest ranked constraints in the given hierarchy which is insignificant to the outcome.

Tableau 2: Glide, [j] epenthesis

Λzie	*VV	*MULT (Lab)	*MULTI (Dor)	DEP(F)	*MULT (Cor)
a. Labial 		*!		**	
b. Dor 				**	*
c. Cor 				*	*
d. Λzie	*!				

From tableau (2), candidates (a) and (d) are eliminated at an early stage of the competition as they could not satisfy higher-ranked constraints on the hierarchy. Candidate (b) performs better than candidates (a) and (d). Candidate (b) incurs three violations and it is equally kicked out of the competition. Candidate (c) incurs two violations as opposed to candidate (b) which incurred three violations. Candidate (c) therefore emerges the winner of the competition.

5.4 Coalescence in OT

In the context of hiatus in the Nzema language, coalescence occurs mostly at the boundary of words. Determining the directionality of each context in this regard however needs investigation. In doing this, faithfulness constraints are used. Thus, the position-sensitive faithfulness approach is adopted to account for vowel coalescence in resolving hiatus in Nzema. As the name implies, Positional faithfulness has to do with loyalty in some specific positions. Loyalty in the sense that segments do not lose their features, they rather preserve feature values of segments and these segments occupying the positions try as much as possible not to shed any of their features. In other words, they are phonological positions that maintain their original form thus resisting any pressure that could cause them change. According to Kager (1999) these positions are salient or prominent because they are positions where contrasts are best realised. Some of these positions include: in word-initial, in a lexical word or morpheme, in stressed syllable and geminate segment (see Casali 1996). For the purpose of this study, the contexts which are most relevant are the initial two contexts that is, in word initial and in lexical word or morpheme. Regarding salient positions in respect of lexical words, nouns have been widely attested that they do

everything possible to safeguard the whole of the category. This implies that in contrast, they tend to resist any phonological process or processes that may affect them negatively than do other categories such as verbs, adjectives, etc. Nouns are known to occupy a strong position in grammars.

21 Constraint ranking: *V#V >> PARSE(-high) >> PARSE(+high), PARSE(F)-lex >> PARSE (F)

*V#V is a markedness constraint which bans vowel sequence at the boundary of words. The remaining are faithfulness constraints. PARSE(-high) requires that a feature that is specified for [-high] in the input root word be preserved in the output. PARSE(+high) on the other hand, requires that a feature that is specified for [+high] in the input root word be preserved in the output. PARSE(F)-Lex requires that a feature (F) in a root (Lexical word) is parsed, and PARSE (F) requires that all features in the input are preserved in the output. The constraints ranked above will help determine the output form from coalesced vowels in Nzema as illustrated in the tableau below.

Tableau 3: Vowel coalescence preferred to vowel elision when V₂ is /ɛ/

bàkà+`ébú	*V#V	PARSE(-high)	PARSE(+high)	PARSE(F)-lex	PARSE (F)
a. bàkíbú		*!			
☞ b. bàkébú				*	*
c. bàk`ɛ`ébú	*!				
d. bàkà`ébú	*!				

From tableau (3) above, candidates (c) and (d) violated the highest ranked constraint hence eliminated. Candidate (a) satisfies the highest ranked constraint, *V#V. However, candidate (a) violates a second higher-ranked constraint, PARSE(-high) by shedding a [-high] feature in its root, which is fatal. Consequently, candidate (b) which also has a violation of a high-ranked constraint emerges the winner as there is no other candidate that can fare better.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, an alternative analysis to hetero-syllabification as a hiatus resolution strategy in Nzema is provided. We have also discussed consonant epenthesis in detail with vowel coalescence as hiatus interrupters in Nzema. The discussion and the Optimality analysis are based on these strategies as they are frequently used for resolving hiatus in Nzema. The consonants that are epenthesized as hiatus interrupters in Nzema are the labial-velar glide, [w] and palatal glide, [j]. Vowel sequences usually occur at word boundaries and within words. For every resolution, the strategy to employ is usually subject to the environment in which the sequences occur. When vowel sequences occur word-internally, Nzema

resolves it by inserting an epenthetic consonant, and when it occurs at word boundary, coalescence occurs. It is worth mentioning that the present study provides a more detailed analysis of the phenomenon of hiatus resolution in Nzema. The discussion has shown that epenthesis of either of the consonants has to do with the vowel that shares feature either in frontness or backness with the consonant in question. That is to say, if the first vowel is a [lab] with a [+high] feature, [w] is inserted between the serial vowels. However, if the first vowel is a coronal [cor], and high for that matter, [j] is inserted between the vowels. The optimality analysis has also revealed that in Nzema, the markedness constraints, *VV and *V#V, which respectively ban vowel-vowel sequence in word internal and at word boundaries, and the faithfulness constraint, PARSE(-high) which requires output-input similarity, are the most highly ranked constraints as far as hiatus resolution in Nzema is concerned. Coalescence of vowels and insertion of a consonant in the output renders it unfaithful to the input. Feature preservation for coalescence is [-high]. Finally, the two hiatus resolution mechanisms; consonant epenthesis and vowel coalescence all violate faithfulness constraint.

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A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF MODAL PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH-TO-FRENCH TRANSLATION OF THE AFRICAN YOUTH CHARTER

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Abstract

This article examines the translation of modal passive constructions in the African Youth Charter (AYC) from English into French. Modal passives play a crucial role in legal texts by encoding obligation, permission, prohibition, and possibility while maintaining neutrality. Yet, their translation often requires structural shifts, as direct equivalents are not always available across languages. Using a contrastive analysis, the study identifies modal passive forms in the English version of the African Youth Charter and analyzes their renderings in the French version as found on the African Union Website. The findings reveal systematic transformations, including conversions into the active voice, tense modifications, and the use of infinitival constructions. These patterns demonstrate how translators balance linguistic constraints with functional requirements in legal discourse. Interpreted through skopos and interpretive theories, the results highlight the strategies by which modality and agency are preserved or adapted in translation. The study contributes to understanding how multilingual legal instruments achieve clarity and consistency, while also reflecting the dynamics of cross-linguistic legal communication.

Keywords: African Youth Charter, interpretive theory, legal translation, modal passive constructions, skopos theory.

Résumé

Cet article examine la traduction des constructions passives modales dans la Charte africaine de la jeunesse (CAJ) de l'anglais vers le français. Les passifs modaux jouent un rôle central dans les textes juridiques en exprimant l'obligation, la permission, l'interdiction et la possibilité tout en préservant la neutralité. Toutefois, leur traduction exige souvent des ajustements structurels, car il n'existe pas toujours d'équivalents directs entre les deux langues. À partir d'une analyse contrastive, l'étude met en évidence les formes passives modales dans la version anglaise de la Charte africaine de la jeunesse (CAJ) et examine leur traitement dans la version française de la charte disponible sur le site web de l'Union africaine. Les résultats révèlent des transformations systématiques, notamment des conversions à la voix active, des modifications temporelles et le recours à des constructions

infinitives. Ces régularités montrent comment les traducteurs concilient des contraintes linguistiques et exigences fonctionnelles du discours juridique. Interprétés à la lumière de la théorie du skopos et de la théorie interprétative, les résultats mettent en évidence les stratégies par lesquelles la modalité et l'agentivité sont préservées ou adaptées en traduction. L'étude contribue ainsi à une meilleure compréhension des mécanismes qui assurent la clarté et la cohérence dans les instruments juridiques multilingues, tout en reflétant les dynamiques de la communication juridique interlinguistique.

Mots-clés : Charte africaine de la jeunesse, constructions passives modales, théorie interprétative, théorie du skopos, traduction juridique.

1. Introduction

In multilingual institutional settings, legal and policy documents are drafted and translated with a high degree of precision to ensure equal authority across languages (Šarčević, 1997). In the context of African supranational governance, English and French number among the six major working languages of the African Union. Foundational legal instruments such as the African Youth Charter are therefore produced in parallel language versions that carry equivalent legal force. The translation of such documents is not merely a linguistic exercise but a normative act that shapes the articulation of rights, obligations, and institutional responsibilities.

A prominent feature of legislative discourse is the modal + passive construction. Expressions such as “**shall be implemented**”, “**must be protected**” or “**should be protected**” encode varying degrees of obligation, necessity or authority. (Collins, 2009). By combining modality with passivization, legal texts are able to articulate binding norms while minimizing reference to specific agents, thereby reinforcing an impersonal and institutional tone. Although modality and passive voice have each received considerable scholarly attention in linguistics and translation studies, their interaction, particularly in English-to-French legal translation, has not been systematically examined. Existing research has tended to treat modality and voice as separate phenomena. Such research has also focused primarily on European Institutional corpora. Consequently, there remains a gap in understanding how the combined structure of modal passives is rendered from English into French in African supranational legal texts. The present study seeks to address this gap by analyzing how modal passive constructions in the English version of the African Youth Charter are rendered in the French version and by identifying the structural transformations that occurs in the process.

1.1 Background to the study and research problem

The African Youth Charter (hereinafter AYC) is a legal and political framework that was adopted by the “Seventh ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government” of the African Union (hereinafter AU) on July 2, 2006, to promote and protect the rights, freedoms, and responsibilities of young people across the African continent. (Abdullahi Manu & Habu, 2024, p. 47; Ubi, 2007, p. 2). It is an official document that guides youth empowerment and policy implementation. Abdullahi Manu & Habu (2024, p.

47) assert that it is “a holistic guiding framework for the signatory countries of the AU” which “addresses the fundamental flaws that negate or deny young people in the continent the right to participate in the political, economic, and social development processes”. The AYC Charter is founded on the belief of signatory member countries as stated in the Charter’s Preamble that “Africa’s greatest resource is its youthful population and that through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead”, (African Youth Charter, 2006). Given the importance of this Charter, we deem it relevant to explore the linguistic phenomenon of the passive voice which is typical of legal English. Lulu (2023) affirms that “the passive voice is a common grammatical phenomenon in English, especially legal English. Given the multilingual nature of the AU, the AYC has been made available in four languages namely, Arabic, English, French and Portuguese. (African Union Commission, 2023). The legislative nature of the AYC necessitates the frequent use of the passive voice to convey obligations, responsibilities, and mandates in an impersonal and formal manner. However, the translation of the passive voice from English to French presents linguistic and structural challenges owing to differences in syntactic preferences between the two languages. (Delisle, 2003; Gagne & Wilton-Godberfforde, 2021).

The Passive voice is a common feature in formal and legal English, often used to emphasize actions rather than actors, thereby creating a sense of objectivity and authority. (Lulu, 2023). The French language tends to favor active constructions or alternative passives and impersonal structures. Delisle (2003, p. 425) affirms that “l’anglais affectionnerait le passif, tandis que le français ami des tournures actives, chercherait à l’éviter à tout prix”. These differences raise important questions about how passive constructions in the AYC are translated into French and whether they retain their intended meaning and legal force in the French version.

This study aims to conduct a contrastive analysis of modal passive constructions in the AYC English text and its French translation. By identifying modal passive constructions in English and examining their corresponding translations in French, this research seeks to uncover the strategies employed in rendering modal passives across these two languages. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the syntactic and functional shifts that occur in legal and institutional translations, especially within the multilingual operations of the African Union. In addition, the study will shed light on broader translation challenges faced in rendering modal passive constructions from English to French in legal and policy documents.

1.2 Research objectives

The study is guided by the following research objectives:

- a. To identify modal passive constructions in the English version of the AYC.
- b. To analyze shifts in syntactic structure when translated into French.
- c. To identify the patterns that emerge as modal passive structures are translated from English into French.

2. The passive voice

According to Siewierska (1984, p. 2), the term “passive” covers diverse constructions in many languages. She cites the following as typical characteristics of passive constructions:

- a. The subject of the passive clause functions as the direct object in the corresponding active version.
- b. In the passive form, the subject of the active clause may appear as an agentive phrase or may be omitted altogether.
- c. The verb is realized in a passive form.

Quirk et al. (1985) explain that typically, the passive is formed using the form of “be + a past participle”. For example:

Active voice: *The committee approved the proposal.*

Passive voice: *The proposal was approved by the committee.*

“*The committee*” which is the subject of the sentence in the active voice becomes the agent in the passive voice.

Alcaraz Varó & Hughes (2014, p. 19) assert that the passive voice is used in legal language “to suppress the identity of the agent responsible for the performance of the act” or when the implied subject is too obvious to need stating”. They cite the example:

“No submissions will be accepted after the stated date”.

Here the agent “*by any party*” “according to them is implied.

Legal English often prefers the use of modals to emphasize, rules, and legal requirements while de-emphasizing the actor. (Williams, 2007) . The modal passive structure is formed by combining a modal auxiliary verb such as *shall*, *may*, *must*, and *can* with a passive construction (be + past participle) The structure of the modal passive is: “Modal + be + past participle”. For example:

The rent agreement must be signed by both parties.

In legal documents, particularly, the legislative genre, modal passives convey obligation permission, possibility or necessity. (Biel, 2014; Boginskaya, 2021; El-Farahaty & Elewa, 2020)

3. Theoretical framework

The present study is grounded in two translation theories, namely, the skopos theory and the interpretive theory. The skopos theory, which was introduced by Hans J. Vermeer, emphasizes the purpose (skopos) of a translation. It posits that translation is not merely a linguistic transfer but a goal-oriented action, where the function of the text dictates translation choices. On the other hand, the interpretive developed by Danica Selecovitch and later expanded by Marianne Lederer focuses on the sense of the text.

3.1 Skopos Theory

The skopos theory is a functionalist approach to translation which was introduced by the German translator, Hans J. Vermeer in 1978. Schaffner (1998), “affirms that translation is not a process of transcoding but a specific form of human action”. Just as every human action has a purpose, translation has a purpose. Thus, the Greek word “skopos” which literally means “purpose” or “function” is the term that Vermeer adopts to refer to the

purpose of translation. Reiß & Vermeer (2014) assert that “a translational action is governed by its purpose”. Thus, before a translator begins a translation task, he needs to define the skopos of the translation. The skopos of the translation should be clearly defined in the translation brief. The skopos determines the methods and strategies the translator would resort to (Munday, 2008, p. 79). The main idea of this theory is that translations should be guided by their intended function in the target culture, rather than strictly adhering to the form of the source text.

3.2 Interpretive Theory (Theory of Sense)

Lederer (2016), asserts that the interpretive theory was introduced in 1960 by Danica Selescovitch. Having lived in many countries, Selescovitch was endowed with the ability to speak many languages. She soon discovered that meaning or sense was not linked to the languages that conveyed it. She proceeded to propose the three stages of translation, namely, “understanding”, “deverbalization” and “reformulation”, where the translator grasps meaning, detaches from the linguistic form, and re-expresses the message in a way that aligns with target language norms. (Lederer, 2016).

3.2.1 The translation process

The translation process as proposed by Selescovitch & Lederer (1984) begins with “understanding”. (Lederer, 1997). At this stage, understanding the text is not limited to decoding words and grammatical structures. Rather, it involves combining the new information presented in the text with the translator’s existing linguistic knowledge, world knowledge, and awareness of the communicative context (Lederer, 2016, p. 11). Through this integration of prior knowledge and textual cues, the translator develops a coherent interpretation of the message and the intention of the source text, which forms the foundation for the subsequent stages of the translation.

The deverbalization stage refers to the phase of the translation process in which the translator detaches the understood meaning of the source text from its original linguistic form. After understanding the message, the translator no longer focuses on the specific words or grammatical structures of the source language but instead retains a mental representation of the underlying sense. (Lederer, 2016, p. 12). At this stage, meaning is processed at a conceptual level, independent of the original wording. This allows the translator to avoid literal, word-for-word transfer and prepares the ground for an effective reformulation of the message in the target language according to its own stylistic norms.

The reformulation stage is the final phase of the translation process in which the translator re-expresses the meaning previously understood and deverbalized in the target language. At this stage, the translator selects linguistic structures, vocabulary, and stylistic features that conform to the norms of the target language and the communicative purpose of the text. Rather than reproducing the surface structure of the source text, the translator focuses on producing a natural, coherent, and contextually appropriate target text that conveys the same sense.

The interpretive theory is particularly useful for complex grammatical constructions like modal passive constructions, which carry subtle meanings such as obligation, permission

and possibility. It also allows for flexible restructuring when English structures may not map directly to French structures. For example:

English: “Youth must be empowered to participate in governance.”

French (literal translation): *La jeunesse doit être habilitée à participer à la gouvernance.*

Reformulated (as guided by the interpretive theory): *Il est nécessaire que la jeunesse puisse participer à la gouvernance.*

Here, the meaning is preserved, but the structure is adapted to sound natural in French and convey the same modal nuance.

3.3 Relevance of the two theories to the study

The skopos theory and the interpretive theory are highly relevant to the study as they emphasize the target audience and the need for adaptation.

3.3.1 Focus on target group

Both the skopos theory and interpretive theories focus on the target group. They transfer the message of the source text by taking into account the needs and context of the target group. They are of the view that the message should meet the needs of the target group. According to Vermeer, to translate is to “produce a target text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances”. (Nord, 2018, p. 12; Reiß & Vermeer, 2014, p. 74).

3.3.2 Involve adaptation

Another key point of convergence between the two theories is their recognition of adaptation as an essential component of translation. Skopos theory views translation as a purposeful activity in which the function of the source text may be adapted to fulfill the communicative purpose of the target text (Nord, 2018). In a similar vein, the interpretive theory of translation emphasizes the reformulation of meaning in a manner that suits linguistic and contextual norms of the target language. In both frameworks, adaptation is seen not as a distortion of the source text but as a necessary strategy for achieving functional and semantic equivalence. From this study, such an understanding of adaptation is crucial for analyzing how translators adjusted modal passive constructions found in the English version of the African Youth Charter to preserve their intended force and meaning in the French version of the Charter.

4. Methods

The present study is a case study which seeks to explore, describe and explain how modal passives in AYC are translated into French. It is qualitative research involving the description and assessment of translation shifts. The corpus selected for the research is the English version of the AYC and its official French translation. Both the source and target texts were retrieved from the African Union website. The source text and target texts were

aligned using SDL Trados Studio. The aligned corpus was then imported into Sketch Engine for corpus analysis. Passive constructions in the English text were then identified and classified using the Sketch Engine Corpus Query Language Tool (CQL). The CQL we entered to generate the modal passive constructions was [tag="VH.*|MD"]? [tag="VB.*"] [tag="VVN"]. In the tagset, tag “is a label assigned to each token in an annotated corpus to indicate the part of speech, grammatical categories and morphological information”. (Sketch Engine, 2025). VH refers to modal or auxiliary verbs, the symbol ‘|’ is an OR operator meaning the tag can match either "VH.*" or "MD", the tag MD corresponds to modal verbs (can, could, shall, should, may, might, will, would), VB refers to the base form of a verb (run, eat, go, etc.), and "VVN" refers to past participles of lexical verbs. Having generated the modal passives using the above-mentioned tagset, we analyzed and categorized corresponding structures in the French translation version of the Charter. Next, we examined the translation shifts - passives that were retained, transformed into active voice or reformulated using other expressions.

5. Results

The study sought to identify modal passives that depict obligation, authority and objectivity in the AYC. With the aid of the Corpus Query Tool (CQL) of Sketch Engine, we identified 41 passive constructions in the English source text, 22 of which are modal passive constructions, representing 53. 7%. This indicates that the majority of passive constructions in the English source texts are modal passives, which can be attributed to the authoritative nature of legislative texts. The table below shows the modal passive constructions in the source text. They are presented according to their unit numbers in the corpus.

Table 1

Unit number as it appears in the corpus	Modal Passive
2	Shall be entitled to
4	Shall be assured
7	Shall not be compelled
9	Shall be informed
10	Shall be integrated
11	Shall be framed
12	Shall be targeted
13	Shall be adopted
14	Shall be set
15	Shall be developed
17	Shall be outlined
18	Shall be accompanied
19	Shall be embraced
20	Shall be directed
23	Should be established
29	Can be reintegrated
31	Shall have the right to be treated
33	Shall be segregated

38	Shall be taken
39	Shall be deposited
40	May be amended
41	Shall be approved

Table 2

Of the 22 modal passive constructions identified in the English text, 10 were retained as modal passives in the French translation accounting for 45.45%. This figure represents less than half of the modal passives present in the original English text. These findings suggest that modal passives in English legislative texts are not always rendered as modal passives in their French counterparts.

English Modal passive constructions retained as modal passives in the French version of the African Youth Charter	
ENGLISH	FRENCH
“should be established” “In this regard, an African discoveries day should be established along with mechanism of awarding prizes at the continental level” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« doit être mise » « A cet effet, une journée africaine des découvertes doit être mise en place avec l'institutionnalisation des prix au niveau continental. » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be taken” “Nothing in this Charter shall be taken as minimising higher standards and values contained in other relevant human rights instruments ratified by States concerned or rational law or policies” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« devra être utilisée » « Aucune disposition dans la présente Charte ne devra être utilisée pour remettre en question des principes et des valeurs contenus dans d'autres instruments pertinents de promotion des droits de l'homme, ratifiés par les Etats concernés ou dans des lois ou des politiques rationnelles » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“may be amended” “The present Charter may be amended or revised if any Member State makes a written request to that effect to the Chairperson of the Commission,” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« peut être amendée » « La présente Charte peut être amendée ou révisée si un Etat Partie envoie à cet effet une demande écrite au Président de la Commission, » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be approved” “An amendment shall be approved by a simple majority of the Member States” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« devra être approuvé » « Un amendement devra être approuvé par une simple majorité des Etats membres » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be integrated”	« doit être prise en considération »

“A youth perspective shall be integrated and mainstreamed into all planning and decision-making as well as programme development.” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« La perspective jeune doit être prise en considération dans la planification, les prises de décisions ainsi que dans l'élaboration des programmes. » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be framed” “Mechanisms to address these youth challenges shall be framed within the national development framework of the country”	doivent être conçus « Les mécanismes visant à relever ces défis doivent être conçus dans le cadre du développement national du pays » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be developed” “National programmes of action shall be developed that are time bound and that are connected to an implementation and evaluation strategy” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« devront être élaborés » « Des programmes d'action nationaux accompagnés d'échéanciers devront être élaborés » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be accompanied” “Such a programme of action shall be accompanied by adequate and sustained budgetary allocation.” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« doit être accompagné » « Ce programme d'action doit être accompagné d'une allocation budgétaire adéquate et durable » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be embraced” “The value of multiple forms of education, including formal, non-formal, informal, distance learning and life-long learning, to meet the diverse needs of young people shall be embraced.” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« doit être prise en compte » « La valeur des diverses formes d'enseignement comprenant l'éducation formelle, non-formelle, informelle, l'enseignement à distance et la formation tout au long de la vie pour répondre aux besoins des jeunes doit être prise en compte. » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)

Table 3

Of the 22 modal passive constructions identified in the English text, 3 were rendered as active modal constructions in the English text, accounting for 13.63%.

English passive modal constructions becoming active modal constructions which employ a modal auxiliary in the French version of the African Youth Charter	
ENGLISH	FRENCH
“shall be entitled” “Every young person shall be entitled to the enjoyments of the rights and freedoms recognized and guaranteed in this Charter	« devra jouir » « Chaque jeune devra jouir des droits et libertés reconnus et garantis dans cette charte, sans distinction aucune de race,

irrespective of their race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language”(African Youth Charter, 2006)	de groupe ethnique, de couleur, de sexe, de langue, » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be informed” “The development of a national youth policy shall be informed by extensive consultation with young people”(African Youth Charter, 2006)	« devra se fonder » « L'élaboration de la politique nationale pour la jeunesse devra se fonder sur une consultation massive des jeunes » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“can be re-integrated” “Provide rehabilitation for young people abusing drugs such that they can be re-integrated into social and economic life;” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« puissent réintégrer » « Assurer la réhabilitation des jeunes drogués afin qu'ils puissent réintégrer la vie sociale et économique ; » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)

Table 4

Of the 22 modal passive constructions identified in the English text, 2 were rendered as active constructions that denote modality but do not employ a modal auxiliary in the French Translation, accounting for 9.09%.

English passive modal constructions becoming active constructions denoting modality that do not employ a modal auxiliary in the French version of the African Youth Charter	
“shall be assured” “Every young person shall be assured the right to express his or her ideas and opinions freely in all matters and to disseminate his or her ideas and opinions subject to the restrictions as are prescribed by laws.” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« a le droit » « Tout jeune a le droit d'exprimer librement ses idées et ses opinions relatives à tous les sujets et de diffuser ses idées et ses opinions, sous réserve des restrictions prévues par la loi » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall not be compelled” “Young people shall not be compelled to belong to an association.” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« a le droit » « Tout jeune a le droit d'adhérer à une association et de la quitter. » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)

Table 5

Of the 22 modal passive constructions identified in the English text, 4 were rendered as “be-passives” in the French translation, accounting for 18.18%.

English passive modal constructions being rendered as be-passives in the French version of the African Youth Charter.
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“shall be segregated” “Ensure that accused minors shall be segregated from convicted persons and shall be subject to separate treatment appropriate to their status;” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« soit séparé » « Veiller à ce que tout jeune qui est encore mineur accusé soit séparé des personnes inculpées et soumis à un traitement différent » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be deposited” “The instrument of ratification or accession to the present Charter shall be deposited with the Chairperson of the Commission” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« seront déposés » « Les instruments de ratification ou d'accession à la présente Charte seront déposés auprès du Président de la Commission de l'Union Africaine. » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be adopted” “The policy shall be adopted by parliament and enacted into law” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« est adoptée » « Cette politique est adoptée par le parlement et promulguée en une loi ; »
“shall be set” “A national youth coordinating mechanism shall be set up and shall provide a platform as well as serve as a linking agent for youth organisations to participate in youth policy development as well as the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of related programmes” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« sera créé » « Un mécanisme national de coordination des jeunes sera créé et servira de plate-forme aux organisations non gouvernementales des jeunes pour participer à l'élaboration des politiques ainsi qu'à la mise en œuvre et au suivi et à l'évaluation des programmes » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)

Table 6

Of the 22 modal passive constructions identified in the English text, 2 were rendered as infinitive constructions in the French translation, accounting for 9.09%.

English passive modal constructions being rendered as infinitive constructions in the French version of the African Youth Charter	
ENGLISH	FRENCH
“shall be targeted” “The policy shall provide guidelines on the definition of youth adopted and specify subgroups that shall be targeted for development;” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« à cibler » « Cette politique devra donner les grandes lignes de la définition de la jeunesse adoptée et spécifier les sous-groupes à cibler pour le développement. » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
“shall be outlined” “National programmes of action shall be developed that are time bound and that	« à définir » « Des programmes d'action nationaux accompagnés d'échéanciers devront être élaborés et devront être reliés à une

are connected to an implementation and evaluation strategy for which indicators shall be outlined. ” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	stratégie de mise en œuvre et d'évaluation avec des indicateurs <i>à définir</i> ; » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)
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Table 7

Of the 22 modal passive constructions identified in the English text, One (1) was rendered “*veillera à*” in the French translation, accounting for 4.54%.

English passive modal construction rendered as “ <i>veillera à</i> ” in the French version of the African Youth Charter	
ENGLISH	FRENCH
“ shall be directed to ” “The education of young people shall be directed to: ” (African Youth Charter, 2006)	« <i>veillera à</i> » « L'éducation des jeunes <i>veillera à:</i> » (Charte Africaine de la Jeunesse, 2006)

6. Discussion

We notice from the results that the modal passive constructions in the AYC are not always rendered as modal passive constructions in French. They are either retained as modal passives or converted to various constructions. This supports the claim by Delisle (2003, p. 426) that the English Passive voice undergoes various transformations when rendered into French.

The study observed that modal auxiliaries that are found in the modal passive expressions in the English texts are either retained in the present tense or they take the future tense as shown in table 2. For instance, “**shall be developed**” which has the modal “**shall**” in the present tense is rendered as “« *devront être élaborés* »” with the modal “*devront*” being in the future tense. In the example “**shall be framed**” which is translated as “*doivent être conçus*”, the modal “*doivent*” is in the present tense. These variations indicate that even when modal passive constructions are retained in translation, differences emerge in modal tense selection as illustrated in table 2. The skopos theory which emphasizes the function of the translated text and the needs of the target audience account for this phenomenon. The French language has its own structural, semantic and pragmatic norms, which influence how modal passives are adapted to ensure readability and acceptability for the target audience. Similarly, the interpretive theory, which focuses on grasping the “sense” of a text explains why English passive modals do not always have direct equivalents French. Once a translator grasps the intended meaning, they discard the words of the source text and reformulate the message of the text in accordance with target language norms.

The modal passive constructions may be converted to active modal constructions as illustrated in table 3, where the expression “**they can be re-integrated**” is translated as “*puissent réintégrer*” in French. Here, the modal auxiliary “*can*” is maintained in the form of the French subjunctive “*puissent*” but the past participle “**re-integrated**” changes to the

infinitive form “*réintégrer*”. We find another example in “**shall be entitled**” which becomes “*devra jouir*”. Again, the modal “**shall**” is retained as “*devra*” with the past participle “**entitled**” being rendered as the infinitive “*jouir*”. The conversion of the modal passive construction to active modal construction supports the assertion made by Delisle (2003, p. 425) that “*la voix passive est plus fréquente en anglaise qu’en français.*” Here again, we see the skopos theory and the interpretive theory come into play, demonstrating that translation choices are driven by functional and interpretive considerations rather than rigid syntactic equivalence.

The English modal passive can also be converted to infinitive constructions, as in the case of table 3 where we find the expressions “**shall be outlined**” being rendered as “*à définir*” and “**shall be targeted**” being rendered as « *à cibler* » both “*définir*” and “*cibler*” are preceded by the proposition “*à*” instead of a modal. This aligns with the assertion by Gagne & Wilton-Godberfforde (2021, p. 72) that there are many passive constructions that do not have direct equivalents in French.

Furthermore, the modal passive structures in English may be transformed to be-passives. Skwarlová (2008, p. 49) explain that “be passives” are passive voice constructions that have an explicit “be” auxiliary. We observe in table 5 that the modal auxiliary “**shall**” in “**shall be segregated**” is dropped in favor of the “be” auxiliary “*soit*” (subjunctive form of the verb “to be”) in the French translation « *soit séparé* ». Similarly, the modal auxiliary in “**shall be deposited**” is discarded in favor of the “be” auxiliary in the French translation “« *seront déposés.* »”

The English modal passive may also be converted to expressions that convey the sense of obligation without necessarily employing a modal in French translations. This is illustrated in table 4 where the modal passive expression “**shall be assured**” is rendered as “*a le droit*” which denotes a right or entitlement. In table 7, we observe that “**shall be directed to**” is rendered as « *veillera à* », which conveys a sense of responsibility. The examples highlight how target language conventions influence the choices translators make.

Another pattern we observed is that out of the 22 modal passive structures we found in the English text, 9 were converted to the active voice in the French translation, representing 40.9%. This is seen in tables 3, 4, 6 and 7. This supports the claim by Gagne & Wilton-Godberfforde (2021, p. 72) that Passive constructions are more frequent in English than they are in French.

7. CONCLUSION

The analysis of modal passive construction in the AYC and their French translations seems to reveal significant structural shifts. While some modal passives are retained, many undergo transformations, such as tense changes, conversion to active voice, infinitive constructions, conversion to be-passives. In some cases, modal auxiliaries shift from present to future tense, while others are replaced with expressions of obligation or responsibility. Notably, 40.9% of the 22 analyzed modal passives were converted to active constructions, supporting the claims by researchers (Delisle, 2003; Gagne & Wilton-Godberfforde, 2021; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995) that English uses the passive voice more

frequently than French. These findings align with the skopos and interpretive theories which explain that translation choices prioritize readability, target language norms and meaning over rigid syntactic equivalence.

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WHAT THE EWE MIND THINKS IT IS: A CASE OF SOME EVERYDAY EXPRESSIONS

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A PHONOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF HIATUS IN NZEMA SYLLABIC SYSTEM

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A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF MODAL PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH-TO-FRENCH TRANSLATION OF THE AFRICAN YOUTH CHARTER

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