

Cover Page



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**Author:** Aalders Grool, Marjolijn Cornelia

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#### 4. Concluding remarks about the event

In 1976, I asked three rural communities to organise a number of sessions of storytelling. I requested to attend a session where they convey the do's and don'ts in the dwelling to their children. It appeared that the session aimed also at entertaining the audience. The sessions took place at the compound of a clan. The seating of the people who attended the session was always identical: the performer and the guest were sitting opposite to each other. The audience gathered around them, facing the performer. A storytelling event is a way to relax in the evening, and to sit down to forget the strains of the working day. Neither the performer nor the audience were dressed up for the event; men wear indigenous clothes, women wear wrappers. The Fon performers do not dance during a performance of storytelling. Storytelling has nothing in common with the various Fon ceremonies where priests or priestesses dance formal dances. Ceremonies may take several days, and often take place during the weekend, for example on two successive Saturdays. Ceremonies go with ritual sacrifices, dancing priests and formal dressing up. Storytelling definitely differs from ritual ceremonies in many ways.

I recorded the stories on audiocassettes. I transcribed and translated the texts into French in Benin, in 1976 and 1977. In 2007, the sound recordings were digitized for further analysis. The corpus consists of about 57 000 words, and about 12 000 utterances. This allows an in-depth analysis of Fongbe narrative discourse. My analysis concerns the Fongbe discourse of the performers of stories in the rural areas of the south of Benin at the time of the recordings.

The content of the corpus has its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Kingdom of **Danxomè** during the reigns of Guezo and Glele, when it was at its apogee. The vehicle language is Fongbe, a language whose grammar was described by French missionaries in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see 1.4.). The stories convey the **vodun** religion and its powerful cults. The stories refer to the gods of the religious pantheons that were worshipped in 1976. They certainly differ from the new pantheons that were developed in recent times. In 1976, at the time of the recording of the corpus, the traditional authority of the chief, the priest and the diviner was still intact in the rural areas. The administration forbade the traditional religion; the traditional power structure was about to be dismantled at the time of the recordings. The performers were willing to organise the storytelling sessions because they were well aware of the threat to their culture.

Half of the performers of the corpus were men and women in their seventies. The audience considered them accomplished performers. All performers were illiterate with the exception of two men who wrote French. This demonstrates that the aesthetical and artistic finesse does not depend on the literacy of the performers.

The gender of the performer influences the kind of stories that are chosen, for women tell dramatic stories, and men tell comic stories. Women weave comic elements into dramatic stories. Gender may point at the use of distinct elements in stories.

Performers used kinetics to support the prosody of the discourse and to point at the agents and their actions in the story. The audience consisted of adults and young children. The adults interacted with the performer; they approved of an issue or anticipated on the story. This interaction was part of the performance.

It appears that the performance is more than skilfully reciting a text, or twisting one's voice to impersonate a character. The performer really has the floor. She or he is a professional artist who manages three competences together: the eloquence of the professional speaker, the acting of the dramatic actor, and the showmanship of an entertainer. In 1976, the performers and the audience considered the performance of the Fongbe **hwènùxó** an acquired art.