

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/21958> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Aalders Grool, Marjolijn Cornelia

Title: Verbal art of the Fon (Benin)

Issue Date: 2013-10-16

14. Style in the use of words

Performers carefully choose their words to colour the performance. One of the main features to colour the performance is the manifold application of the deictic function. I will describe the qualifications that the performers give to the central participant. Agents have no qualifications; the performers confine to name each agent, or they even omit one of them. I will consider the array of deictic markers that occur. Performers use connectivity to create suspense, and they use meta-discourse markers to comment on the actions of the agents. Finally, I will discuss the ideophones that the performers coin.

14.1. Qualifications of the central participant

The central participant is the protagonist who is the star actor of the plot. He is the only character of the story, for he is a sentient being in dramatic stories, and a calculating being in comic stories.¹⁰³ The central participant has divine and supernatural properties. Let us recall that he is either a personal object, a deity who transforms into a human being, or the trickster in comic stories.

At his first appearance in the story, the central participant is indicated with the definite marker *ɔ́*, which is placed after the noun. The definite marker tracks his whereabouts in the story and so becomes a pragmatic deictic marker that spots him throughout the story. When he meets with misfortune, the performer omits the marker, which is the style figure of omission. The omission refers to the behaviour of the gods who temporarily change shelters in the case of misfortune. The definite marker tracks the central participant, but also his aliases and paraphernalia.

Let us consider two examples of the tracking of the central participant, for example the saucepot in ‘The sadist co-wife’. The first example shows a flash forward by the audience that uses no definite particle. On the contrary, the performer uses the definite particle when she tells that the second wife looks in vain for her saucepot, shown in the second example:

nùsúnnú-zén	ví	cè	jǒèèè-jǒèèè	[3.25]
sauce-GEN.pot	child	POS ₁	IP	
‘My dear little saucepot, frizzle sizzle’				[AC 2: 129]

¹⁰³ This is the relevant difference between the central participant and the agents of the corpus. Agents have neither feelings nor thoughts; they incorporate the good and the bad side of a coin. They are named after their function (see 5.2. and 5.3.).

nùsúnnú-zén **ví** **cé** **ḡ**
 sauce-GEN.pot child POS₁ DEF

‘My dear little saucepot, that’s the one’ [AC 2: 160]

Notice that the second example shows the crying out by Agent A, who uses the definite marker to indicate that she cannot find the saucepot in which she cooks and stores her delicious sauce. Both examples show the use of the cherishing **ví** ‘child’. The example exhibits the accumulation of a possessive pronoun and the definite marker.

Epithets and Epitomes

The performers sometimes use epithets and epitomes to personalize the central participant. Fongbe has only a small number of adjectives that convey a quality. Therefore, performers of comic stories coin epitomes that suit the trickster **Yḡgbó**. The trickster is by far out a unique central participant who has specific epithets that add to the comic character of the stories. Nevertheless, the performer of one of the ‘Cat and leopard’-stories invented the names of the youngest kitten and the youngest leopard cub (AC 16; see p. 186).

There is a difference between epithets and epitomes. The epithet has a social or economic function. An epithet can occur at any place in the story. An epitome is a surname that explains what happens, and that has a fixed relation to the story (Van Engelenhoven 2009, personal communication).

The trickster **yè** has for example the following epithets:

dàwé **dé** **ka** **nyí** **adɔ-nɔ** **yɛ**
 man INDF but name web-GEN.mother Yè

bò **e** **nɔ** **yí** **ɛ** **dḡ** **yɔ.gbó**
 CJds CL₃ RM call 3SG say Yò.big

‘Now a man had the name Fat Big Yè ‘the Web’s Owner’, and they always called him Big Yò’ (Ay 2)

The epithet **adɔnɔ** literally means ‘the web’s owner’; it means that **yɛ** is the owner of a web. The qualifying ‘big’ indicates the big mouth of the boasting trickster who is a small being (see 7.3.). The stories show various forms, such as **adɔnɔ yɛgbó** ‘Gluttonous big Yè’ (Ay 2). This is synonymous to **adɔnɔ yɔgbó** ‘Gluttonous big Yò’ or **yí ḡ** ‘that well-known Yò’. The reference to the web means that **adɔnɔ yɛgbó** is a spider. This brings to mind that the Fon people do not say aloud the name of a person (see p. 76). The native Fongbe speakers always translate the epithet

adɔnɔ into ‘gluttonous’. This translation also occurs in the dictionaries that mention that the word is synonymous to **adɔtɔnɔ** (Segurolo 1968: 9; Segurolo and Rassinoux 2000: 9). Both authors assume that the first component is **adɔ** ‘intestines’. In my view, the first component is **adɔ** ‘spider’s web’ for reasons of tonality and use. The diphthong may disappear in composed words; on the other hand, a low tone often persists. Furthermore, the word occurs in one of the stories of the corpus. Here it has a mid and a high tone (Ay 3). The hyena is one of the agents in the trickster story about the Orphan and the Market of the Ancestors. He is said to be **adɔtɔnɔ wɛ** ‘he is a greedy one’. This qualifies the character of the hyena that has the role of the evil agent. Actually, he has nothing in common with the trickster.

Cece Klikpo was very skilled in coining a number of epitomes during his performance of one of the trickster stories in Ayou (Ay 4). He made the audience cheer at the epitomes that he created. The following epitomes appear in different fragments of the story:

adɔ-nɔ **yɛ-gbó** **ádi-glo-jo** **ɔ**
 web-GEN.mother yè-big large-bag.made.of.skin-fat DEF
 ‘Owner of the spider’s web, Big Yè, that one with the baggy fat tummy’

yɛ-ɖaxo **’né** **ɔ**
 Yè-big DEM_R DEF
 ‘there you are! that famous Mr Big’

adikwe-’su
 wooden.flute-GEN.man
 ‘the player of the wooden Fon whistle’

tila **adikwé-ɖɔ-’su**
 amulet GEN.wooden.flute-say-GEN.man
 ‘the whistle player of secrets’

All the references point to a lazy spider in his web, that effortlessly picks up his food, and sees all the secrets around him, because he is small and lives in dark corners. It is highly probable that the Fon trickster is the double of the Twi trickster **Ananse** from Ghana.

Let us consider the epitomes that **Falilatu Adekadjou**, the performer of one of the dramatic versions of the ‘Cat and leopard’ story coined. One of the agents, the leopard, kills her youngest child. The cub, whose fate is tragic, gets the following name:

aji sɔ nyɔ́

birth equal be.good

‘Child of noble blood’ [AC 16: 178]

The central participant of this story is the youngest kitten. The performer calls him the smartest one of the family, and he gets the following name:

aji sɔ ɛn’ nyɔ́

birth/game know four be.good

‘Master of the Four Grains’ which is one of the forms of the West African game **àjì** ‘Adjì’ [AC 16: 211, 277].

The trickster **Yɔ̀gbɔ́** communicates to his stepbrother by playing a talking whistle by which he conveys the so-called ‘whistled language’ that no one can overhear. The following example is from Ayou 2:

a ma sè akwɛ ce gbe à

CL₂ NEG understand flute/money POS₁ GEN.language QM

‘you hear what my whistle says, don’t you?’

a ka vé sè akwɛ ce gbe à

CL₂ but ILW understand flute/money POS₁ GEN.language QM

‘now please, you hear my whistle’s speech, don’t you?’

The performer uses the word **akwɛ** ‘money’ instead of **adikwɛ** ‘wooden flute’. This happens more often. The pun is obvious in this story, for the trickster wants that his stepbrother wins the contest and it’s reward: the world (see also pp. 95, 104).

Finally, one of the performers mentions that the agents have a native language; the cat speaks the Cat’s language, and the leopard speaks the Leopard’s language that is the royal language:

awũ-sín-gbe ɔ́

cat-GEN-language DEF

‘the Cat’s language’ [AC 16: 287]

kpɔ́-sín-gbè

leopard-GEN-language

‘the Leopard’s language’ [AC 16: 288]

na.gán-sín-gbe ɔ́

mother.chief-GEN-language DEF

‘the language of the royal aunt’ [AC 16: 300]

These last examples are epitomes that signal that the leopard tries to deceive the cat's sons by speaking Cat's language. The odds are in her favour, but the youngest cat is smart and puzzles over who is speaking and what she has in mind.

14.2. The use of deictic markers

Performers use deictic markers as one of the main features to enhance their speech. Deictic markers emphasize the crucial events of the story and support the thread of discourse. The performer points out the chronological order of the story for example, by the adjunct **din** 'now'. The deictic function highlights the star character of the central participant by adding the definite marker **ɔ́**.

The use of these markers in storytelling is more elaborate than textbooks and grammars suggested in the past. The performance exploits the possibilities in language usage in full. Performers use a broad range of deictic markers to indicate the dimension of the virtual distance between the audience and the agents. Markers point at a location that is either proximate to the performer, or more remote from the performer. Deictic markers are always placed after a noun or an adjunct.

Two particles function as a deictic marker: the focus marker **wè** 'it is' or 'there you are', and the presentative marker **djè** 'here you are!'. The marker **djè** is replaced by the abbreviation **è** at the end of an utterance (see A 4: 137, 138). I glossed the focus particle as {**aFOC**}, 'a' for argument, to distinguish it from the {**pFOC**}, 'p' for predicate that occurs in the non-perfective marker. The argument focus particle is used for example in ideophones. The presentative marker points at an agent or an event.

été ka djè nya [0.31]

what but PM IJ

'Look at this! Now what is going on, huh?' (AC 2: 49)

The use of demonstrative pronouns is more eye-catching in storytelling than in daily speech, for performers make pointing gestures when they use them. Fongbe has two demonstrative pronouns: **éɔ́**, meaning 'this here, near to the performer' {**DEM_N**}, and **éne** 'that there, remote from the performer' {**DEM_R**}.

bó sú hɔ̀n bó lɛ djido axi [0.71]

CJss close door CJss repeat set.forth market

'and she shut the door and she went to the market again'

axi-'né é yi bó wá é ɔ́ [0.87]

market-DEM_R CL₃ go CJss come RES TOP_{CL}

'when she returned from that market'

or: * 'she returned from that market in question' [AC 2: 56, 57]

The last translation is improbable, for the two utterances form a tail-head construction (see 10.1.).

The accumulation of several deictic markers is usual in storytelling. The markers occur in a range of various combinations of which deictic focus particles, deictic markers and demonstrative pronouns are part. Performers combine possessive adjectives with the definite marker.¹⁰⁴ The following example shows this combination that indicates the central participant:

nùsúnnú-zén cé ǎ un ma ka mǎ 'né [0.62]
 sauce-GEN.pot POS₁ DEF CL₁ NEG but find DEM_R
 ‘but I cannot find my own saucepot’ [AC 2: 61]

Performers in Ayou often use this combination to point out the trickster:

yègbo towé-vǎ
 big Yo POS₂-DEF
 ‘your trickster there’

Performers also place the definite marker after a demonstrative pronoun to increase the impact:

nùsúnnú 'né ǎ [0.23]
 sauce DEM_R DEF
 ‘there you are! That sauce!’

Kinetics plays a crucial role in storytelling. Performers are continuously pointing at an agent and a specific action of the story. Performers use the combinations of deictic markers to emphasize the gestures they make.¹⁰⁵

Performers use adjuncts to mark the chronology of the story, or to indicate the switching from the order of time and setting. Adjuncts indicate the nature of successive events or actions: **din** and **din ǎ** ‘now’, as well as **trolo** ‘immediately’. These adjuncts refer to the events of the story, to the moment that they take place in the story, not to the ‘real time’. Konrad affirmed this use (Konrad 1994: 110ff.). Sometimes the particle **ǎ** is added to the adjunct, though often there is no pause. The performer emphasizes the adjunct by adding the particle that conveys an important action is on the verge of happening. The particle functions as a discourse marker in these cases, meaning ‘you know’, ‘well’ and so forth.

¹⁰⁴ Fongbe has two possessive adjectives: **cè** ‘my’ and **towè** ‘your’. Possession in the 3SG personal pronoun is conveyed by the genitive case marker **étǎn** or **tǎn** ‘his’ or ‘her’ (see Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 67f).

¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, I have no pictures of the kinetics, for performers did not allow me to make pictures or films during the recordings.

This usage of adjuncts is similar to the use of the following chronological indications like ‘one day’, ‘the next day’, or **zǎnzǎn sɔ̀** ‘the next morning’, or **gbadanu sɔ̀** ‘the next evening’ that indicate that the story advances. In general, the indications of time in the stories move the story forward by indicating the successive actions that occur one after another. Performers sometimes use poetic expressions as an extra: **éé ayí hɔ́n ɔ́** literally meaning ‘when the earth opened’, that is ‘when the day rose’, and so on. These expressions give notice to the audience that ‘at this point of the story’ a crucial action happens. The usage of the Fongbe adjunct **sɔ̀** in narrative discourse often is limited to the meaning of ‘tomorrow’, which differs from the usage in speech where it means ‘yesterday’ as well as ‘tomorrow’ (see for example Ay 5 and AC 16). However, in one story, the performer deliberately creates confusion by using **sɔ̀** alternately as ‘tomorrow’ and ‘yesterday’ (Ay 7). This adjunct is context sensitive, for the context decides whether the word refers either to the past or to the future.

The indication of locations is vague. The stories often take place ‘in the hut’ or ‘at the market’. Kings live in a palace with a huge porch and a number of huts, kitchens and bathrooms. Ancestors live ‘in the supernatural world’ or in ‘the House of Rain’ where ‘the Market of the ancestors’ is located. Gods live in the ‘Land of Sky’ or take shelter in ‘the tree of Abomey’.

14.3. Topicalization and omission of agents

The performers sometimes topicalize the noun of an agent, but they also may occasionally omit an agent from the discourse. Topicalization emphasizes the agent in question while omission indicates that the agent has a very low position. The following example shows the utterance of the noun that conveys Agent A, and the insertion of the personal pronoun in the following utterance, which makes the noun a topic:

nỳ̀nù́ **ǎ́** [0.93]
 woman TOP_N
 ‘that woman we know’

é **só** **axi-nú** [0.62]
 CL₃ take market-GEN.thing
 ‘she prepared her goods’ [AC 2: 12, 13]

Right before the peak, the performer contemptuously refers to Agent B as the following example shows:

ǎ́ **tɔn** **ǎ́** [1.05]
 INDF GEN TOP_N
 ‘her co-wife’

é **wà** **dědě** [0.33]
 CL₃ come.to softly
 ‘she approached softly’ [AC 2: 23, 24]

The following example shows the full omission of Agent B in the opening utterance of the Abomey-version of ‘The sadist co-wife’:

ø **wε** **ko** **ǎ́`àsú** **tɔn`sí** [1.19]
 ø [=CL₃] pFOC already be-husband GEN-hands
 ‘actually she was already her husband’s wife’ [A 5: 1]

This utterance confirms a fact that the audience must know right from the beginning. Actually, before the story starts, the performer makes sure that the first wife has no position indeed.

14.4. Suspense through connectivity

The clause-final topic **ɔ** is the main discourse connective in the performance (see chapter 10). The clause introducer **ée** is used to build up suspense, when it equals an utterance. The coordination of utterances uses the conjunctions **bó** and **bɔ̂**, meaning ‘and’. These conjunctions often are the first word of the utterance, but style may transform the usual occurrence. The conjunction occurs as an utterance. On the other hand, the performers put it at the end of an utterance. The result of these usages is the increasing of suspense. Clauses that are coordinated by the conjunction **bó** convey also the referential identity of the subject of the clause. The introduction of a new subject of the clause requires the use of a dynamic verb in combination with **bɔ̂** ‘and’.

The Klikpo brothers in Ayou transform connectivity into a stylistic element. They use the conjunction **bó**, meaning ‘and’ (having an identical and referential subject as in the preceding clause), and the conjunction **bɔ̂**, meaning ‘and’ (changing the subject in the clause that follows) as a suspense marker. Either both performers put the conjunction at the end of an utterance, followed by a pause, or they deliver the conjunction as a single-worded utterance, preceded and followed by a pause. This frequently occurs when the subject changes: **bɔ̂**.

Subordination links utterances. The performers use **ka** or **kɔ** or **kɔn** to convey subordination. These words are not the first word of a clause. They are placed after the subject, but precede the verb. They indicate a contrast with the preceding clause. However, their meaning in narrative discourse is not ‘but’ as Segurola’s dictionary advices. The meaning is close to a comment as ‘well’, ‘now’, ‘you know’.

Performers often duplicate, or even quintuple the adjunct **káká** as a suspense marker. The adjunct expresses ‘very much’ or ‘very long’. The performer extends the time of speech, and so increases the intensity of what is happening. The marker always occurs in duplication to emphasize that the performers talk about a long time. The repetition of this duplication may rise to more than five times, and the storyteller’s voice gets gradually louder to increase the emphasis. There often is a pause after this marker. In the **Yɔgbó** stories the suspense marker is usually prolonged for a comic effect: **kákákákákákákákáká**. Konrad confirmed this effect (Konrad 1994: 104ff.).

The adjunct **jén** that means ‘only’, ‘precisely’, ‘really’ in daily speech, is used in storytelling to indicate a specific point in the story: ‘now’, ‘there’, ‘at this point’. This adjunct is always used on its own.

14.5. Meta-discourse markers: comment and opinion

The performers use monosyllabic utterances that interrupt their speech. The meta-discourse markers **án**, **àn** and **hǔn** convey the comment and opinion of the performer. They often comment on the actions of the agents, especially on agent B. These markers are all nasal vowels. Their tone is an indication of the meaning of the comment. A high tone conveys surprise: **án** ‘Can you believe this’; a low tone expresses disapproval: **àn** ‘I say’. A diphthong that starts with a high pitch before it descends and then rises again indicates anger or indignation: **hǔn** ‘She is despicable!’¹⁰⁶

The Fongbe word **nùgbó** is an adjunct. Performers sometimes nominalize it by adding the definite particle as the following example shows:

nùgbó **ó**
truth DEF
‘That is the truth, really’

The meaning of this combination of the adjunct and the particle is similar to the clause one often hears in Italian **e vero**.

14.6. Ideophones and onomatopoeias

Fongbe performers enjoy coining ideophones to express sensations or sensory perceptions. Ideophones have a grammatical function in the clause that is comparable to a nominalized adjunct in clauses. Ideophones conform to the Fongbe language system to which they belong. The performers coin a sound that has a meaning. These sound coinings have nothing in common with the imitations of an animal sound in English, for example, ‘boo!’ or ‘heehaw’. Performers use ideophones to entertain the audience, and to help the audience to visualize the story.

Ideophones express the sensations that reflect the present state of an agent. The morphology of ideophones reflects grammaticalization. Either the performers coin them from an existing word or they coin them as a newly created word. The main features of ideophones in narrative discourse are the following: reduplication, alliteration, and assonance. Reduplication, for the ideophones consist of three or four

¹⁰⁶ The use of the meta-discourse marker in performances differs from the use of the astonishment/amazement/surprise marker as described by Lefebvre: the M-D marker is not the last morpheme of the clause. On the contrary, either it is the first morpheme of the clause, or it is an utterance itself. Secondly, the marker and the accessory tones convey distinct emotions (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 126).

repetitions of words. The figure of alliteration often occurs, in particular by the use of the phonemes **gb** and **kp**. Some of the examples that follow show assonance.

The opening formula of a story shows the frequent occurrence of the ideophone **vīin**, which expresses the movement of the story by the sound that imitates the fast hovering around of a bird. There are many examples of ideophones that show grammaticalization that often is the nominization of a verb. I will observe a number of these ideophones. The flying sparrow hawk is a spectacle that leads to the coining of **vuwa vuwa vuwa vuwa vuwa** meaning ‘(he took off) to fly with his big wings, and he flew, smoothly climbing and hovering around’ (Ay 3). The ideophone is repeated five times; it consists of the sound **vuin** (synonymous with **vīin**) ‘fast’ and the verb **wǎ** ‘come.to’. One of the performers enjoyed coining the movements of the small rooster that is pestering the huge elephant by fluttering above his head: **vrururu** (Ay 6). This is a remarkable ideophone, for the consonant ‘r’ hardly occurs in Fongbe, people often replace it by ‘l’.¹⁰⁷ The ideophone probably stands for ‘fast and silly’; **lũ** meaning ‘to be silly’.

Performers also use the focus marker to coin words. One of the ‘Cat and leopard’-stories shows a purring cat: **mumumu wè** (AC 16:159). The sound is a coined word, for Fongbe has no verb **mu** that means ‘purr’. Ideophones may have a focus marker:

ɔ	mumumu	wè	>	ø	mumumu	wè
AUX	purr	pFOC	>	ø	purr	aFOC
‘he was purring’ > ‘the purring cat’						

The ideophone of chasing dogs starts with the interjection **o** and again uses the focus marker. The verb in the following example is the Fongbe adjunct **gbligbli** ‘at top speed’: **o gbligbli gbligbli gbligbli gbligbli gbligbli gbligbli wè**, which means ‘Rushing in at top speed, rushing in at top speed, rushing in at top speed that was what they did’ (AC 19).

Let us consider a third example that shows a lengthening of the sound, and has no focus marker. It shows how the rooster-trickster proudly boasts after he defeated the elephant: **kokoliwəkó**, which clearly reminds us of the English onomatopoeia ‘cock-a-doodle-doo’. However, this Fongbe sound consists of three verbs ‘to crow, to swell, to hoot’ meaning ‘when he was crowing, he boasted his own importance’ (Ay 6).

Performers sometimes refer to a noun and coin ideophones from that noun, such as the following two examples show. The ideophone is based upon the Fongbe noun **kpó** ‘leopard’ and materializes the state of an agent in a pseudo-cleft construction

¹⁰⁷ There is no entry for ‘r’ in the two Fon-French dictionaries that I consulted (Segurolo and Rassinoux 2000; Höftmann 2003).

that involves the grammaticalization of the noun (AC 16: 317). The example pictures the last cry of the dying leopard that is forced to fall from the tree: **kpókp'kpəkəkəlén**. This ideophone starts with the noun for leopard **kpó**, whereupon the vowel **ó** is devoicing to **'** and replaced by the schwa, a non-existent vowel in Fongbe: **kpə**. This **kpə** is once repeated before it changes into **kə**. The ideophone ends with the nominalized verb **lén** that means 'pay the penalty'. The meaning of the ideophone is clear: the leopard pays with her life for the slaughter of her own cubs and the attempted murder of the kittens of her stepsister, the cat. This ideophone shows also that the performers use phonemes that do not exist in Fongbe.

The second example concerns a cat. Let us have a look at the following example of frightened mice. The cat, which is a friend of the orphan, sneaks around, as if he prowls for game. The mice cry out three times **awii nya 'wii nya 'wii nya**, meaning 'the cat is bad!'. The ideophone consists of the noun **awii** 'cat' and the verb **nyà** 'is hunting' (AC 6). The sound itself resembles the English onomatopoeia 'meow'. The Fongbe ideophone is an example of camouflage or mimicry of the sound of the natural foe, which is used to deceive the much bigger cat. The corpus has also an example of what the cat says. The cat makes sure that her sound is positive, whether it is true or not. She says in one of the versions of the 'Cat and leopard'-stories the following:

'wi-nya-oo

cat-hunt-NEG

'the cat is not hunting', and 'meow' [AC 16: 290]

Performers also coin ideophones that convey a sensation; they go without focus marker. One of the performers depicts the cat that wants to take back his master's magical ring as a cat that sneaks through the bush **kleklekleklè**, meaning 'he stealthily crept along' (AC 6). The mice that agree to help the cat, are rummaging in the king's possessions. The performer compares them to ghosts: **kutu kutu kutù** (AC 6). The rope that unties itself to catch the thieves makes the following sound: **gblalalà** meaning 'sweeping rhythm of the drum of the lightning god **Xevicsù**' (AC 3).¹⁰⁸ The parents who go to the palace of the king who marries their child walk **blíblíblí**, as commoners are obliged to do when meeting the king (AC 4). The verb **blí** means 'get dirty', that is 'thick with dust'. The performer said that the defeated elephant is dying in action: **foti foti foti**, meaning 'finished off to nothing', or 'the elephant swayed to and fro' (Ay 6). After the leopard killed her last cub, the youngest cat played with the cub's head: **gbogblohun**, meaning 'cut-widen-eyes', that is 'the eyes opened and closed', like a doll's eyes (A 7).

¹⁰⁸ Note that the rope is the 16th sign of **Fa** in another story. The rope is a religious device.

The following ideophones are samples of reduplication. The first one shows four repetitions that according to the performer, imitate the sound of dripping blood: **kahun kahun kahun kahun**, literally meaning ‘the funeral drum that is made of a calabash’ that is ‘thud, thud like the funeral drum’ (Ay 4). The sound of the breaking of an edible and protective gris-gris resembles the dripping blood: **kahùn** ‘crack’ (AC 19). Fire is said to burn fiercely: **hèhèè hèhèè** ‘blazing and white-hot’ (AC 6). The hyena says **yĩ yĩ yĩ yĩ** when he speaks to **Yògbó**, who is called **Yiyi** in Ewe as Konrad reported (Konrad 1994).

Even simple ideophones may have a meaning. The performer who wants to convey that an agent ventures into the bush says **vóéééé**, meaning ‘out of earshot’ (AC 19). A feather of smoke at the horizon is said to be ‘hardly visible’: **tíííí** (AC 19). The two versions of ‘The sadist co-wife’ convey the smell and the sound of the sizzling herbs and spices when cooking a sauce: **jòèèè** ‘frizzle sizzle’ (AC 2 and A 5).

It is obvious that ideophones are sometimes funny. Moreover, they are meaningful. Notice that the examples clearly show the dilemma of translation. This dilemma is acknowledged by the authors who try to give a translation, and by the authors, amongst whom Konrad, who prefer not to translate (Konrad 1994: 156). The dilemma just reflects the difficulty of understanding ideophones. In general, it is more complex to understand nonsense syllables than ideophones that stem from a noun or a verb.

Performers enjoy coining words, as the following example shows: The performer of one of the ‘Cat and leopard’-stories mentions that the cat speaks **adesingbe** ‘Cat’s’ or ‘Cat-language’. The leopard speaks this language when she tries to deceive the children of the cat; however, the youngest kitten, which is the smartest one, cannot be deceived (Ay 5).

Performers prefer coining ideophones to creating onomatopoeias. Sound imitations rarely occur in the stories. One of the rare examples of onomatopoeia is the sound of the **alinglè**, the small bell of the **vodun** priests: **yoyoyowé** (AC 16: 248). A second example shows the dental click **tsk** in **tsknyanyi** which conveys irritation or indicates that one dismisses a person ‘Get lost!’, ‘Go to hell’ (AC 15). The dental click also has a daily use: Fon people often lift the forefinger of the right hand and move it while uttering five successive dental clicks to dismiss salespersons in the street. Performers convey the sound of guns also by onomatopoeias. A small gun sounds like **gbòò** ‘pow!’ (Ay 4). The sound of a big shotgun is **kpaàn** ‘bang’ (Ay 2). The sound made by the Doblígodo woman who falls in a brook after stealing and eating raw beans, is **dǎǎ** ‘splash!’.

14.7. Discussion of and conclusions on the use of words

Performers carefully choose their words when it comes to deictic markers, clause markers and clause connectives, discourse markers, and the individual coining of ideophones. The majority of the choices are the result of a form of grammaticalization. This is for example visible in the use of the deictic function in the discourse. The most salient example of the deictic function in the performance is the tracking of the central participant by the definite particle **ɔ́**. The performers use the deictic function also to highlight the agents, but the use deviates from the one of the central participant. On the one hand, Agent A sometimes is a topicalized noun; on the other hand, the figure of omission is used to indicate Agent B.

Performers use a broad range of deictic markers to depict the virtual distance between the audience and the agents. These occur either on their own or in a range of various combinations. The following markers indicate the deictic function: the deictic focus marker **wè**, the presentative deictic marker **ɔ̀jè** and the demonstrative pronouns point at a proximate **éɓ** or more remote location **éne**. Fongbe allows a number of combinations, for example, the possessive adjective goes with the definite marker, or the demonstrative pronoun accompanies the definite marker and so forth.

The connectivity of the utterances shows a variety of adjuncts. Several adjuncts have a deictic function that underlines a specific utterance of the story, while some conjunctions function as suspense markers. The formulae that indicate the time of the day function also as a discourse connective. Performers use meta-discourse markers to give a commentary on the actions of the agents. Finally, the use of words highlights the actions of the central participant by the insertion of epithets and by the coining of epitomes, ideophones and less often onomatopoeias. Performers take the opportunity to choose their words and to create a personal style.