

**Semantic convergence in the Lower  
Volta Basin (West Africa):  
A micro area within the Macro-  
Sudanic Belt?**



Felix K. Ameka

# Outline

1. Goal
2. Is Areal semantics possible? A programmatic approach
3. The Lower Volta Basin as a convergent area
4. Shared lexicalisation patterns
5. Shared Collocational patterns
6. Shared Routines
7. Concluding remarks: LVB in the Macro-Sudanic Belt

Matisoff 2004

**IS AN AREAL SEMANTICS POSSIBLE?**

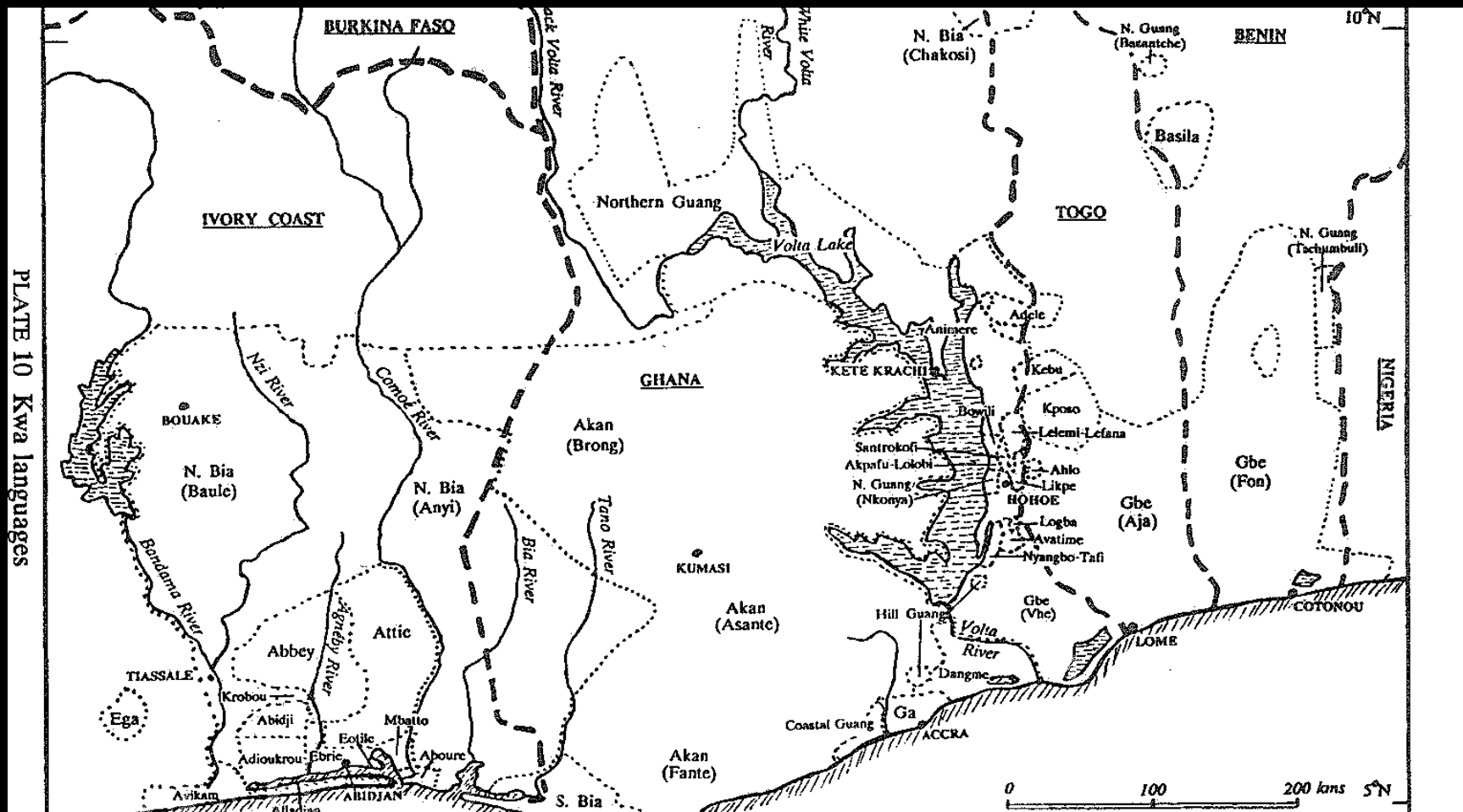
# Goal

The goal of the project is to describe and document the meanings and meaning distinctions shared by a set of related languages in the Volta Basin (West Africa).

# Volta Basin

The “Volta Basin” here corresponds more or less to the core area of the Kwa and Gur language groups as currently defined within Niger-Congo (e.g. in Williamson and Blench 2000). In geographical terms this means the area extending from the Nigeria-Benin border as far as Cote d’Ivoire to the west and northwards into Burkina Faso.

# The Gulf of Guinea



# Subgroups of Kwa

Potou-Tano				
Potou		GTM-Tano		
GTM		Tano		
KA	NA	West	Central	Guang

## VFOLTA BASIN

six countries: Ghana and Burkina Faso share the major portion, others are: Mali, Togo, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire

Map from Fiedler, Ines (2015) Contact-induced changes in the expression of information structure in the languages of the Lower Volta Basin.





# Lower Volta Basin

The Lower Volta Basin is situated at the downstream part of the Volta Basin, near Lake Volta

It is within different layers of macro-areas:

The Trans-Atlantic Sprachbund, (Muysken et al 2019)

the Macro-Sudanic Belt (Geldermann e.g. 2011)

and the Fragmentation Belt (e.g. Greenberg 1983)

The region is characterised by linguistic diversity and almost universal multilingualism of the speakers.

# Socio-historical context

Between 1700 and 1874, the Akwamu nation was one of the strongest in the southern sections of present-day Ghana. (Ansre 1997:3)

- 

By the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Akwamu had established her political power over the Guan principalities in what is today the Akwapim area, over Ga-Dangme areas and even to the east of the Volta (Ansre 1997:5)

# Akan influence

Krepi, referred to inland and northern Ewe country including Peki, came under the suzerainty of Akwamu, an expanding Akan state, around 1708.

Wars of state formation amongst the Akan west of the Volta between 1670s and 1730s inundated the Ewe of southeastern Ghana with refugees (Akyeampong 2001: 39)

Because of these interactions and the increasing language repertoires through language learning and appropriation, there are effects and influences of various languages on one another.

# Examples of Akan influence in LVB

Cultural institutions - e.g., swearing of the oath leading to the word *atam* 'oath' in Ewe and other languages; talking drum and drum language

[Ewe *ta nú* vs. *ká atám* 'to swear an oath']

The number of Akan family names ... as well as the names of weekdays and birthdays and other Akan loan words used in various languages indicate the influence of the Akwamu hegemony at a time in history.

# Convergence zone

The (Lower) Volta Basin has been described as a convergence zone (Ellis 1984), that is, a geographical zone in which transfers of linguistic patterns yielding parallel structures are widespread among a group of languages. The languages are geographically contiguous, belong to the Kwa (Niger-Congo) family and there is social contact, often of asymmetrical nature, among the different groups.

# Explaining similarities observed between two (or more) languages

“If we observe similarities between two languages, then there are, in principle, four reasons why these similarities may exist.

First, they could be due to chance.

Secondly, they could stem from the fact that the two languages are genetically related [...].

Thirdly, the two languages could be in areal contact [...].

Fourthly, the property could be a language universal ...”

(Comrie 1989: 201)

# Questions informing research

- (i) What are the shared meaning features and how are they distributed?
- (ii) What factors are responsible for the spread of the meaning features:
  - are they due to genetic factors, i.e., are they inherited from the same ancestor?
  - or are they due to contact?

# Questions (cont'd)

- (iii) What are the shared semantic structures and the processes through which they arise?
- (iv) What factors motivate the observed patterns? Are they universal tendencies in language structure? Environment, or cultural practices?



# Shared patterns in LVB

We focus in this talk on:

Lexicalisation patterns: lexico-constructional patterns

Collocations (based on shared cognitive schemas in the area)

Shared interactional formulae

Shared conceptualisations of lexical domains extensions of temperature terms

We draw attention to the Trans Atlantic Sprachbund and some of the features that are shared

# Linguistic area

- Thomason (2001: 99) defines a linguistic area or Sprachbund (Trubetzkoy 1930) as
- “... a. geographical region containing a group of three or more languages that share some structural features as a result of contact rather than as a result of accident or inheritance from a common ancestor.”

# A Trans Atlantic Sprachbund?

- the close historical and linguistic relationship between the languages of Surinam in the Caribbean and, in particular, The Gulf of Guinea in West-Africa can be viewed in terms of a Trans-Atlantic linguistic area or Sprachbund
- Trans-Atlantic linguistic area or Sprachbund is not so much characterized by geographical contiguity but by the historical evidence of massive population movement due to the capture and forced transportation of slaves.
- A contact network in casu through the slave trade (van den Berg et al. 2015)

# In Surinam

- there are about five major contributing languages or language complexes:
- Gbe, Kikongo,
- English, Portuguese, Dutch,
- and a handful of resulting creole languages.

# Does Trans-Atlantic meet the criteria?

**Shared structural features.** The number of shared structural features is of course a matter of investigation and debate, but there are certainly shared semantic patterns

**Not an accident.** The features of the creoles certainly do not resemble those of the contributing languages by accident, but there is a debate in Creole typology on the issue of the origin of the creole structural features.

**Not inheritance from a common ancestor.** There are two different families involved in the emergence of the creoles: Niger-Congo and Indo-European, as well as individual languages descending from different branches of these families.

# Creole formation in Surinam

... creole formation was a fairly rapid process and there was a subsequent period of prolonged bilingualism in at least Gbe (languages) and Kikongo.

... it is clear that the Surinam creoles display more African features than most circum-Caribbean creole languages. This argues for a longer period of adstratal, rather than substratal, influence, which can be explained by several generations of bilingualism.

(van den Berg et al. 2015: 9)

# Surinam and Guinea

- We conclude that the Surinam Creole languages share structural features both with the Gbe languages and Kikongo and with their European lexifiers. The process of adoption of West-African features however, was adstratal, i.e. selective, creative, and gradual, rather than instantaneous and automatic, as the relexification hypothesis would suggest.
- (van den Berg et al. 2015:14)

# Linguistic areas to areal linguistics

In the identification of common characteristics of African languages (cf. Heine and Nurse 2008), some phonological, morpho-syntactic and grammaticalisation patterns have been proposed for the macro linguistic areas of Africa. Shared semantic features are either bracketed out or based on global meanings of collocations but presented as meanings of individual lexical items



# Assumptions

Three levels of meaning:

Semantics 1: Stored shared ideas about signs +  
compositional rules

Fill in box [world knowledge, cultural scripts,]

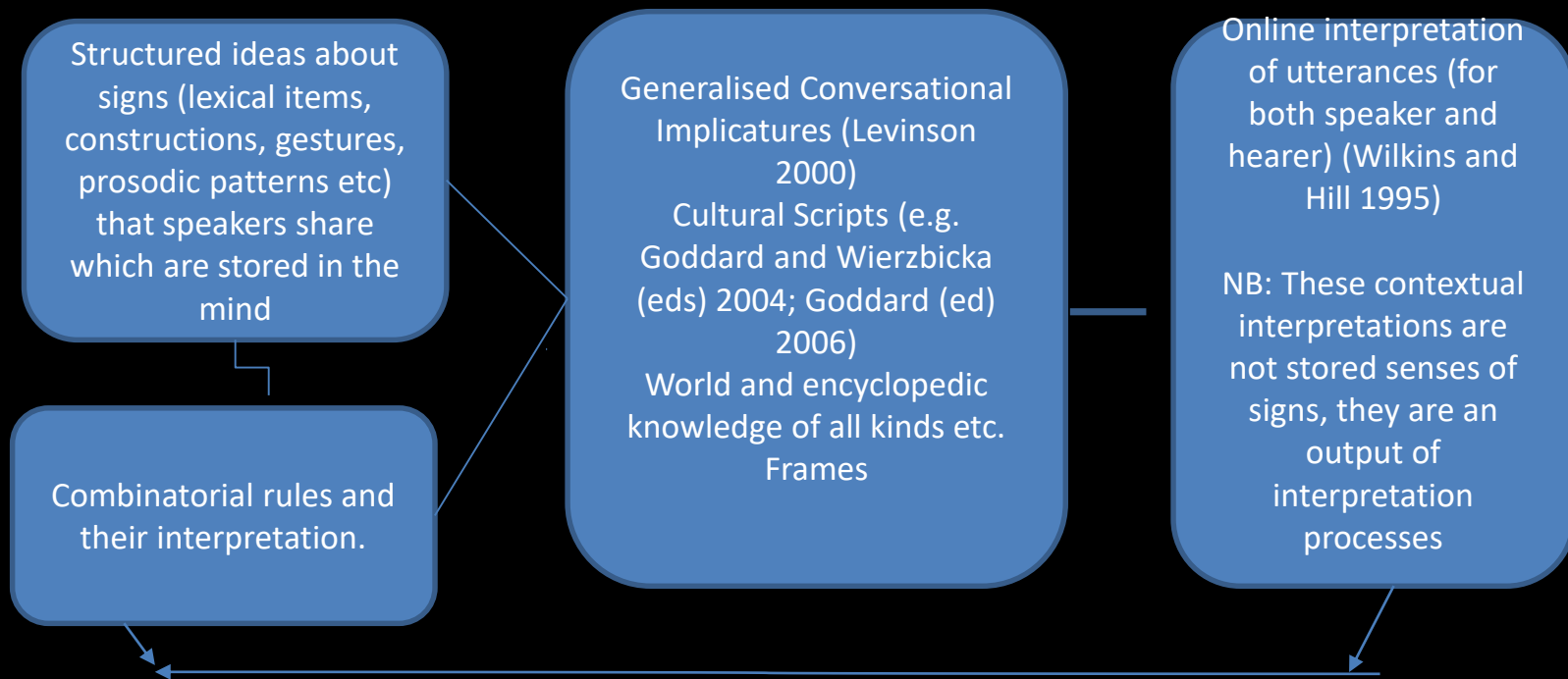
Semantics 2: Online interpretation (in context)

# Assumptions

Meanings can be decomposed and be stated in terms that are prior and more intelligible than the sign that is being explicated (Aristotle; NSM, MTT)

Meaning is not translation equivalent

# Meaning Construction: three levels of meaning (cf. Ameka 2019)



# SEMANTIC PATTERN TRANSFER

# Pattern transfer

- As Herskovits and Herskovits (1936: 131) put it
- “... the peculiarities of Negro speech are primarily due to the fact that the Negroes have been using words from European languages to render literally the underlying morphological patterns of West African tongues.”
- Relexification

# Gbe sources for Semantic patterns

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62 George L. Huttar, James Essegbey and Felix K. Ameka

**Table 1. Results from 2003 study (33 senses)**

Sense attested in Ndyuka	Ga	Twi	Ewe	Kabiye
MOUTH = POINT of sharp object	+	+	+	+
MOUTH = TIP of tongue	+	+	+	+
BREAST MOUTH = NIPPLE	+	+	+	+
MOUTH = SHARP EDGE of knife	+	+	(+)	+
MOUTH = OPENING of bottle	+	+	+	+
MOUTH = MOUTH of river	+	+	+	+
MOUTH = START of year	(+)	-	(+)	?
TONGUE = LANGUAGE	-	-	-	-
ARM/HAND STOMACH = PALM	-	+	-	-
ARM/HAND = TREE BRANCH				

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BUTTOCK(s) = BASE of pointed object	?	+	(+)	+
BUTTOCK(s) = BASE of hill/mountain	-	-	-	+
HEAD = TOP of tree	-	-	+	+
HEAD = TOP of hill/mountain	-	-	+	+
(for) that HEAD = for that REASON	?	-	+	?
HEAD CALABASH = SKULL	?	-	-	+
BE LOC HEAD = LEAD	+	-	-	+
BE LOC BACK = FOLLOW	+	+	+	+
HARD/STRONG EARS = STUBBORNESS	?	+	-	-
STOMACH = PREGNANCY	+	-	+	-
FACE = IN FRONT OF	+	+	+	+
BACK = BEHIND	+	+	+	+
HEAD = ON TOP OF	+	-	+	+
MOUTH WATER = SALIVA	-	-	-	-

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BE LOC BACK = FOLLOW	+	+	+	+
HARD/STRONG EARS = STUBBORNESS	?	+	-	-
STOMACH = PREGNANCY	+	-	+	-
FACE = IN FRONT OF	+	+	+	+
BACK = BEHIND	+	+	+	+
HEAD = ON TOP OF	+	-	+	+
MOUTH WATER = SALIVA	-	-	-	-
EAR EXCREMENT = EAR WAX	-	-	+	?
BACK FOOT/LEG = HEEL	?	-	-	-
ONLY BODY = NAKED	-	-	+	-
FATHER-IN-LAW = SON-IN-LAW	+	+	-	-
but not = MOTHER-/DAUGHTER-IN-LAW				
Totals	16/24	14/29	20/29	16/26
Total percentages	67%	48%	69%	62%

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# Polysemy copying, colexification?

One polysemic pattern usually postulated is that many African languages use a verb which means 'hear' to code other forms of perception such as taste, smell, and also speak a language.

The languages in the Volta Basin express such meanings with structures involving a **verb** meaning 'hear' but it is not the verb itself that *means* 'understand' or 'speak a language'. It only has that interpretation in combination with a noun that denotes language or a postposition that refers to 'under'.

# 'speak/understand a language'

- Ewe: se gbe
- Akan te kasa
- Ga nu Ga
- hear language
- 'speak/understand a language'

# Understand something

- Ewe:        se     X     gɔme
- Akan        te     X     ase
- Ga           nu     X     shishi
- Tafi         nu     X     kesi
- Likpe        nɔ     X     kasɔ
- hear X     under
- understand X

# Begin something

	CONTACT verb	NP	Postposition 'under'
		[Postpositional Phrase] object	
Ewe	dze		gɔme
Ga	je		shishi
Siwu (GTM-Na)	sè		Kà(r)ũ
Sekpelé (GTM-Na)	sé		kásõ
Tafi (GTM-Ka)	kpé 'put.in/on'		kesi
Akan	hye 'put.on'		ase

# believe

TABLE 4. Lexicalization of 'believe'

Language	Subgroup	V <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>2</sub>
Ga	Ga-Dangme	he 'receive'	ye 'eat'
Nawuri	Northern Guang	kɔɔlu 'receive'	dzi 'eat'
Tuwuli	GTM-Ka	tɛ 'receive'	do 'put in'
Ewe	Gbe	xɔ 'receive'	se 'hear'
Likpe	GTM-Na	fo 'receive'	nɔ 'hear'
Akan	Tano	gye 'receive'	tie 'hear'
		gye 'receive'	di 'eat'

# believe

Sɛlɛɛ	GTM-Na	fu 'receive'	nu 'hear'
Logba (Ikpana)	GTM-Na	né 'get, receive'	nu 'hear'
Tafi	GTM-Ka	yɪki 'get, receive'	ŋa 'eat'

# break

	Break-smash	Collocation/idiom	Fulcrum-break	extension
Ewe	gba 'break, burst' (disintegrate, collapse)	gba gǒ 'break pot' (of woman) give birth [Based on euphemism of talking about pregnancy as pot]	ɲé 'fulcrum break' (e.g. stick)	'harvest crops' (based on breaking crops like maize)
Ga	jwa 'break, burst (disintegrate, collapse)	jwa tɔ 'break pot' (of woman) give birth	kũ 'fulcrum break' (e.g. stick)	a. 'harvest crops' b. cheat, swindle
Logba (Ikpana) GTM	bli 'break, burst (disintegrate, collapse)	??	fifi 'fulcrum break' (e.g. stick)	
Tutrugbu (Nyagbo)	yě 'break, burst (disintegrate, collapse)		dzyini 'fulcrum break' (e.g. stick)	
Tafi (Tɔgbo)	yě 'break, burst (disintegrate, collapse)		dzyinī 'fulcrum break' (e.g. stick)	bhui 'cut; harvest'
Likpe (Sekpelé)	ba 'break, burst (disintegrate, collapse)		fésə 'fulcrum break' (e.g. stick) from fé 'open' and sə 'causative'	
Akan	pae 'break, burst' bó		bú	

# Cut (transitive uses)

<b>'Cut' collocations and readings (transitive)</b>	<b>Akan twa</b>	<b>Ewe tso</b>	<b>Ga fo</b>	<b>Tafi bhui</b>
Cut head = behead	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cut penis = circumcise	[Cut foreskin]	yes	[Cut foreskin]	Yes
Cut = create e.g. picture	Yes	No	No	No
Cut = compose song	No	No	Yes	No
Cut = judge/ decide case	No	Yes	No	Yes
Cut a drink = pour (and consume)	Yes	No	Yes	?
Cut (N) inside = excessive amounts of N e.g. salt	Yes	Yes	Yes	?
Cut breast (for offspring) = wean a child	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



# Cut (intransitive uses)

<b>Cut Collocations and readings (Intransitive)</b>	<b>Akan twa</b>	<b>Ewe tso</b>	<b>Ga fo</b>	<b>Tafi bhui</b>
Spontaneous cut e.g. Rope	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cut = stop flowing of liquid	Yes	Yes	?	Yes
Get cut e.g. toe	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

**A SHARED CONCEPTUAL SCHEMA  
FOR FEELING**

# Bodily bases of feelings



**Happiness in the Eye and  
the Heart:**

**Somatic Referencing in  
West African Emotion  
Lexica**

**Vivian Afi Dzokoto**

*Fayetteville State University*

**Sumie Okazaki**

*University of Illinois at  
Urbana–Champaign*

# Feelings in the body- general term

The Dagbani (Gur, Niger-Congo) of Northern Ghana lack a label for the western category of emotion - the word that best serves as a collective label for affective experiences also doubles as a label for non-emotive internal states of the body.

(Dzokoto 2010: 69)

# Fante (Akan) –Kwa, Niger-Congo

- A term that is equivalent to the English word *emotion does not exist* in the Fante language. Participants in the focus group frequently used the word *atsinka*, which covers both *emotional experiences (such as happy and sad)* and *physiological states (such as hunger and thirst)*. An English translation of **atsinka** suggested by the Fante-English translators is “what one feels or senses inside.” (Dzokoto and Okazaki 2006: 127)

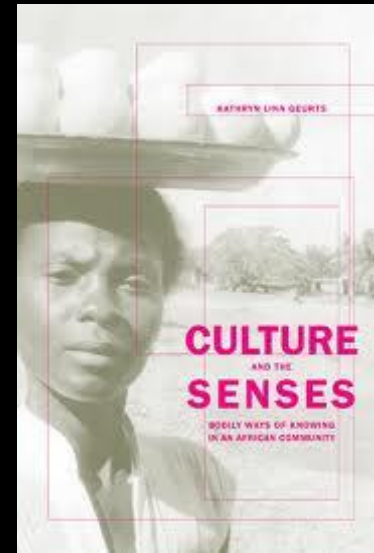
# Ewe ethnotheory of feeling in the body

- se      náné      le      lã.me  
hear      something at      flesh.inside  
'feel something in the body'

dó      tó      lã.me  
set      ear      flesh.inside  
'listen to your body'

se-se-le-lã.me 'feeling inside the body'

# Kathryn Geurts



# *Seselelāme*: An Ewe cultural category (Geurts 2003)

- *Seselelāme* is an ideal illustration of a culturally elaborated way in which many Anlo [Ewe] speaking people attend to and read their own bodies while simultaneously orienting themselves to objects, to the environment, and to the bodies of those around them ...



## *Seselelāme* (2)

... it is difficult to make a direct translation into English of the term *seselelāme* for it refers to various kinds of sensory embodiment which do not fit neatly into Anglo-American categories or words.

## *Seselelāme* (3)

- ... *seselelāme* ... encompasses and links states of perception, affect, and disposition that we treat as independent variables that can be separated or distinguished from experiences in the other domains ...

## *Seselelāme* (5)

- ... *seselelāme* represents a cultural meaning system in which bodily feeling is attended to as a source of vital information. Instead of concentrating on distinctions between sensations and emotions, and between intuition and cognition, these experiences (or processes) are ... subsumed in one category called *seselelāme*

**FEELINGS IN THE BODY – EYE-RED**

DEV'T  
MEANS  
EYE-RED

AF



# EYE-RED in Ewe (1)

é-fé ŋkú biã

his eye is red,

he is covetous; he is down-cast, sorrowful; he is revengeful (Westermann 1928)



## EYE-RED in Ewe (2)

**biã ηkú:** [VP] to redden one's eye, to covet, to long for (Westermann 1928)

**ηkúbiã** [N] lit. 'eye-red'; determination, seriousness, ambition, anxiety etc.

# EYE-RED in Akan

**M'ani a-bere**

1SG-eye PERF-become.red (FKA)

lit: My eyes are red

'I am jealous/covetous' (Gyekye 1995:166)

**anibere** 'ambition, determination, anxiety, jealousy, envy, covetousness, desperation'



# EYE-RED Chumburung (Guang, Kwa)

- **Fo akato a pee**

‘Your eyes have ripened/ are red’

i.e. You are sad/ serious’

**kelato-pee**

‘eyes-red’

i.e. ‘Seriousness’

(Hansford 2005: 153)

# Metaphor?

... this metaphor about sadness SADNESS IS RED EYES does not parallel any of Kovesces' source domains (2000:25) such as SADNESS IS DOWN, SADNESS IS DARK, SADNESS IS LACK OF HEAT.  
(Hansford 2005: 153)

# EYE-RED Dagbani (Gur)

Nini-mooi

Eye-red

‘Worry/anxiety’

(Dzokoto and Okazaki 2006: 129)

**WATER TEMPERATURE**

# Talking about water temperature

Tsi-ε            fá

Water-DEF      become.cold/cool

‘The water is cool/cold’

Tsi-ε            gblɔ

Water-DEF      become.lukewarm

‘The water is lukewarm’

## Talking about water temperature (2)

Tsi-ε                    xɔ    dzo

Water-DEF            get    fire

‘The water is hot’

Tsi-ε                    vé

Water-DEF            pain

‘The water is painfully hot’

Tsi-ε                    fie

Water-DEF            boil

‘The water has boiled’

# Water and cultural domains

Verb	Cultural practice	Applicability to other object
Fá 'become, cold cool'	Drink, food preparation, bathing (living humans especially in hot weather) washing and general cleaning etc	Applied for temperature widely; extended to emotion and social ambience
gblɔ 'lukewarm'	Drink, when one cannot take cool water and for medicinal purposes; bathing in not so hot weather	Not applied outside water
Dze/ xɔ dzo contact/get fire	Bathing, also as base for some food preparation or medicine preparation	Applied widely for 'hot' temperature

Vé 'painfully hot'

'Bathing (the point at which one can put one's hand in it without feeling burnt'

Used only for temperature with respect to water; but used in other domains, taste; bodily sensation, emotion etc.

Fie 'boil'


For bathing human corpses; this is carried out with boiling water and living humans are not supposed to heat their water for bathing to boiling point. It is also used for removing body hair from slaughtered or more generally dead animals;

also used for medicinal purposes i.e sterilizing ; the state of water needed for preparing certain foods



# Talking about water in Sɛlɛɛ

Table 6. Water-related temperature expressions in Sɛlɛɛ

Warming	Attributes of water in Sɛlɛɛ	English translation/paraphrase
	<i>n-tú benle</i>	water about to boil
	<i>n-tú kpánkpa</i>	very hot water
	<i>n-tú filale</i>	hot water
	<i>n-tú bíbíbí</i>	warm water (after touching it)
	<i>n-tú sánsa</i>	warm water (just looking at the vapour coming from the water)
	<i>n-tú nintɛɛnintɛɛ</i>	neither hot nor cold
	<i>n-tú yɔɔle</i>	cool water ( not the one from the fridge)
	Cooling	<i>n-tú nyɛɛnɛ</i>

# **EXTENSIONS OF TEMPERATURE TERMS**

# Extended Uses Of Temperature Terms

- To be cool is an attribute of a dull person

(7)    **ɔ-sáńko-bi**                    **nwu**    **lɛ-yɔɔ**  
CL1-woman-DIM    DET    LSM.RP-be.cool  
‘The girl is not smart. (lit: the girl is cool)’ (Sɛlɛɛ)

(8)    **nyɔnuvi**    **sia**                                    **fa**                    **ɲutɔ**  
girl            DEM                                    be.cold            INT  
‘This girl is very dull’                                    (Ewe)

## Negative attributes with cold temperature

**(9) foso lɛ-nyɛnɛnɛ**  
sheep LSM.RP-cold  
'Sheep are stupid' (Sɛlɛɛ)

**(10) ne ho yɛ nwunu**  
3SG body be cold  
'His body is cold' (He is not hygienic. It is repulsive)  
(Akan)



Cold temperature is associated with  
peace, calmness and quiet

- Expressing peace

**(13) na                    míá    ḡutí    ná-fá**  
give:IMP            1PL    skin    SUBJV-become.cold/cool  
‘Grant us peace!’ (Ewe)

**(14) ka      maaruḡ      be      fu      zie**  
Let      cold              be      2SG    place  
‘Let peace be with you’. (Dagaare)

- Expressing calmness

(15) **nyónu má fé dɔ.me fá**  
woman DIST POSS stomach become.cold/cool  
‘That woman is calm.’ (Ewe)

(16) **e hɛ jɔ**  
3SG eye cold  
‘He is calm’ (Dangme)

- Expressing quiet

**(17) to.me-fá-fá''**

ear.containing.region-RED-become.cold/cool

'quiet \ peace'



# HOT Temperature Domain

- 'Hot' is primarily extended to 'dangerous' and 'unpleasant' contexts.
- This is the case in all the sampled languages.
- However we found two examples where 'Hot' is used in a positive context.

# Positive attribute with HOT

(18) **ɔ-sáńko-bi**

CL1-woman-DIM

**nwu le-fila**

DET LSM.RP-be.hot

**dí a-saa**

PP CL8-thing

**o-tekete**

CL1-learn

‘The girl is very intelligent’ (Sɛlɛɛ)

(19) **ne bo yɛ hye**

His chest be hot

‘He’s bold | courageous’. (Akan)

# ‘HOT\FIRE’ used to convey bad news

(20) **míá gbó dzè/xò dzò**

1PL environs contact/get fire

‘There is bad news at our place.’ (Ewe)

(21) **bló–klò bé–fú**

1PL-environs AGR-become.hot

‘There is bad news at our place.’ (Siyase)

(Adjei 2012)

- HOT expressing stress and anger

**(22) n'aso                      yε        hye**

3SGPOSS.ears be        hot

'He is under stress | pressure | busy'. (Akan)

**(23) n        iŋε        tɔlεε                      la**

1SG body be-hot-PERF        AFF

'I am stressed'. (Dagaare)

**(24)**    n'aso                              γε            hye  
            3SGPOSS.ears                      be            hot  
            'He is under stress | pressure | busy'. (Akan)

**(25)**    n            ιηε            τυλεε                              la  
            1SG    body    be-hot-PERF AFF  
            'I am stressed'. (Dagaare)

**(26)**    e                              tsui    he                              e-dɔ  
            3SGPOSS                      heart    surface                              PERF-hot  
            'He is angry' (Ga)

# **SPEECH FORMULAE**

# PROVERBS

# Tafi (KA-GTM)

Bétítsū oturoeleté ovutó 'éfú b̥p̥ɔi láp̥ɔi ɔlíṁ?

bé-tí-tsū o-turo e-leté o-vutó ki-fú

3PL-NEG-set CM-lie CM-owner CM-roof CM-fire

b̥p̥ɔi lá-p̥ɔi ɔlí kɪmɪ

CM-scatter 3PL.DEP-scatter 3SG.IND inside

'We do not set fire to a dishonest person's roof, we tear it apart.'

)Bobuafor 2021)

Tafi KA-GTM



# Ewe (GBE)

wó-mé-tó-á                      dzo    gbefolá            fé  
3PL-NEG-stab-HAB            fire    liar                      POSS

xɔ                                      o,  
house                                      NEG

ɔe                      wó-ka-nε  
pFOC                      3PL-scatter-HAB:3SG

‘You do not set a liar’s house on fire, you search  
it diligently.’ (Dzobo 1973)                      Ewe (GBE)

# Ga (Ga-Dangme)

Apasafo    tsu            lɛ    ashaa    kpa  
Liar        house       DEF   3PLburn   roof  
kpa

scattering

‘One does not burn down the house of a liar but rather removes the roof’

ANON

Ga (Ga-Dangme)

# Dangme (Ga-Dangme)

lakpatɛ    aloo nyangɔɔ    tsu    ɔ  
liar        DISJ liar        house        DEF  
a    sɛ    se    de    a    kpaa  
3PL    burn CONJ ??    3PL    roof

- ‘One does not burn down the house of a liar but rather removes the roof’

ANNON

Dangme (Ga-Dangme)

# Tafi

Ano shishe átínyunyā 'mī, kibhım y'ányunyā?

a-no shi-she á-tí-nyunyā a- mī

CM-person RED-grow SM-NEG-frown CM-face

kı-bhım yí á-nyunyā

CM-anus 3SG.IND SM-frown

'An elder does not frown his/her face, it is the buttocks he/she squeezes.'

# Ewe

Ame.tsi.tsi      mé-γɔ-ɔ      ηkú.me      o  
person.elder      NEG-frown-HAB face NEG  
gbi      wò-γɔ-ɔ  
buttocks      3SG-frown-HAB

‘An elder does not frown his/her face, it is the buttocks he/she squeezes.’

# Concluding remarks

“the concept of co-lexification can ... be used for the purpose of areal linguistics and areal typology”

In short, the chief failing of a field dictionary is that it indicates not so much **the meanings of words but the fact that they exist. They do not define: they document.** It is as if the dictionary were saying "If you want proof that the word *yángá* occurs in the language, elicit for the concept 'mouth.'" (Samarin 1967:208)  
(Emphasis added)

# Beware of glosses and translations

Dimmendaal (1995:19), 2015: 120):

Approaches to lexical semantics e.g. in dictionary work often rely on denotational overlap with English words (or any other language into which terms are translated) to establish the meanings of lexemes.

Glosses often reflect an informant's satisfaction that the investigator has learned an **approximate** meaning, but this may still be different from a correct **definition** of what a particular term actually refers to in the language under investigation.



# Semantic fieldwork

- But it is also true that the methodological challenges of semantic fieldwork are not, or not adequately, addressed in the relevant literature. In actual fieldwork practice, we tend to rely unduly on translations (from a metalanguage into the language under investigation and vice versa), **and we then use the resulting translation equivalents as the basis for our semantic analyses. In this context, we often forget that they only provide an indication to the meaning of an expression, but that they do not constitute its meaning.**” (Hellwig 2010: 804-805 emphasis added)

# Thank you!



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