

## Portrayal of Children and Adults in Ewe Proverbs

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### Abstract

Traditional database access mechanisms use role based methods and attribute based information to present and store facts. Ewes have the belief that every adult portrays the child s/he was, and every child portrays the adult s/he will become, and in every society, children grow to become the adult whose traits they exhibit in childhood. As such, some of such adult traits are believed to be part of their behavior patterns in their stages of life and growth. The saying that ‘agble si le nu wɔ ge la xi mee wokpɔnɛ lena (the bumper of a harvest is seen in the growth of the seedlings)’ emphasises the futuristic view of Ewes on their children. Generally, folklore, for centuries, has been a tool for various social functions and a treasure of knowledge. Among the Ewes, oral tradition has been, and is playing fundamental and advanced roles in the study of various folkloric and narrative elements and proverbs are not an exception. Proverbs, as the philosophical views of societies, provide extensive data for folkloric studies. In reality, proverbs and other figurative expressions as well as indirect and direct expressions project pictorial concepts about a people. These provide a password for in-depth study about a people, and in this context the Ewe people. This study investigates how proverbs reveal who a child or adult is in the wisdom of the Ewes. This informs on how the needy and the weak are seen and catered for among Ewes as well as how role performance and responsibility measures are regulated among Ewes. The study employs contextual and functional approaches on studying this concept in the natural setting. Data was collected through documents, interviews, group discussions and native speaker intuitions. Data from primary sources were recorded, transcribed and translated for analysis. The analysis was in logical narrative form. It shows that children are part of the community, embodying past and future traditions of a society. They are viewed as valuable and immature hence need care, love, affection and much attention while elders are viewed as knowledgeable, experienced, wise, and custodians of culture and tradition as well as agents of their transmission. In addition, age and gender were found to be regulating or skewing expressions involving child-adult relations when proverbs are used. It views literature as the blend of knowledge, culture and architecture and their employment is performing acceptable sociocultural roles. The study concludes that the substance of the content, the text and the intentions for speech performances involving proverbs and others are controlled by relational parameters of gender, age, appearance, environment (habitat, climate, space and time), roles and responsibilities, context and purpose of the speech occasion.

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### 1.0 Introduction

Studies on traditional data adopt ‘roles’ and attributes’ as information components that present and store facts about a system or an occurrence. The attributes inform on qualities that give form and meaning to components deemed as fit in performing given roles. In this regard, compositions surrounding the understanding of life or a system consist of a relational view on the natural form, behavior, appearance and location of things as compared to the other. Such relations present a direct or indirect information about the features or forms of one object that makes it unique in performing certain roles as or than the others. It also shows that one needs to be familiar with each entity and the features in order to understand why and how they function and exist. This study considers how Ewe proverbs present children and adults and their roles in the society. Here, words are used to elicit and describe who an adult or a child is as found in the selected wise sayings or proverbs of the people. These wise sayings or proverbs are the highest forms of knowledge and understanding through which the totality of the culture or ways of life of the people are portrayed, performed and preserved. It is the total core, which projects the beliefs, the traditions and the wisdom of the people through verbal and non-verbal arts.

Language is used mostly, for the constructions, representation and interpretation of such compositions or the proverbs. As an oral art, such compositions demand the higher mental properties of decoding and encoding texts, associating and analyzing the texts along the lines of how they are constructed, the components used in the compositions and how they are used in contexts as acceptable according to the culture of the people. Employing such approaches (Dogbey, 2012) in order to have a clear understanding of a people through the various forms of their language usage is believed to be having a correlation with individual’s psychological levels of maturity, experiences and the acceptable or standardized social ways of expressing thoughts. Being literate in such knowledge and education of a people made one a cultured citizen of that society and one can function by playing varied roles among the people. These features and assumptions made some scholars to classify proverbs as speech for the elders and the learned in the society (Dogbey, 2012).

The Ewe people hold a belief that every 'adult' has traits of the child s/he once was and every 'child' also has traits of the adult s/he will become. The Ewe sayings "*Agble si le nu wɔ ge la, xi mee wokpɔne lena*" - (The bumper of a harvest is seen through the flourishing of the seedling / young crop) and *Ha be yidi tsi nye tsi* - (The swine says the early morning rain is the true rain) emphasise these beliefs and assumptions on whom a child will become as an adult and who an adult is among the Ewe people. Exploring what expressions constitute proverbs, how proverbs exist, their place in the literature of the people, the elements that build the structure of proverbs and how proverbs portray given concepts, which in this case refers to 'adult and child' to mark 'elder' is a laudable endeavor towards understanding the people.

Proverbs have both verbal and non-verbal characteristics and persuasions. Generally, proverbs are part of folklore studies and traditional speech events (Dogbey, 2012, Kyei-Poku 2015). Ewes perceive proverbs as truths that carry great moral weight. Osei-Tutu (2002) says, among the Ewes, those who know how to use proverbs in context are highly regarded because proverbs lead to the soul of the Ewe people. It is affirmed that among the Ewe people, proverbs are akin to wisdom hence to them, competence in functioning with proverbs is a sign of maturity. As such, a person who is rich in the knowledge and use of proverbs is usually marked for leadership or becomes a leader who serves as a mouthpiece and represents the society in the days of arguments and situations of in-depth explanations about phenomena. In reality, languages have their unique stocks of proverbs, which provide insight into the philosophy and behaviour of man. They reflect the society, contain and carry out keen observations of everyday life and beliefs of the people. Language throws light on the manner and nature of life and a people in a society as well as everything in existence which is known to man; whether beneficial or not. Even though these assertions, primarily shows that much is known about proverbs and other figurative language forms; their functions, what they sound like in performance, and in existence as a genre, their age and duration of usage, their contexts and what the story behind them is, their composition and composite structures, origins and effects among others, yet there are still rising debates about what exactly proverbs constitute and portray (Mieder, 1993, cited in Mieder, 2008).

The totality of law and order are enshrined in proverbs. In the views of Agbemabiase, (2016) proverbs are the morals, values and unwritten laws that rule communities, and constitute the collective conscience of a people. They are derived from human activities and constitutes everyday speech and non-speech events of the people. Dogbey (2012) says, proverbs are the salted speech of the elderly used to season the minds and the lips of the young to orient their minds, bodies and acts. He explains that we become what we say and what we say is mostly what we are, hence having a seasoned mind and speech with proverbs makes one a true educated and cultured person for roles in society. When proverbs are used (Finnegan, 2012, Ladzekpo, 2014) participants experience a kind of change in role, content, interpretation, thought and other things. This goes to buttress the fact that proverbs control the totality of behaviour, thoughts and acts in every social or cultural system.

The scale of preference in measuring the past, present and future of a society are often in the nature of language and proverbs used. Dogbey (2012) asserts that in understanding a person in respect of being a child (young) or adult (old) there seems to be some socio-cultural scales used in determining the roles and acts of a person. Such socio-cultural scales, which are culture specific, are what actually defines the uniqueness of one culture from the other. The scale is believed to have some subscales that give varied interpretation of concepts, thoughts, actions, traits and roles depending on given contexts, needs and participants involved as well as time and place of the events. He affirms that proverbs exist as tools for addressing socio-personal challenges. Introducing proverbs into speech changes the face of the discourse in order to measure the 'maturity or competence of the individual.' The use of proverb also presents face-threatening or face-saving acts positively or negatively. Nsoh, et al (2010) have the view that though proverbs seem to have a crystalline or fixed forms with regard to meaning, the fitness in their usage is controlled by context, content and nature of participants. This observation makes it very difficult defining proverbs hence they tend to be rather described than defined. The descriptive phenomena provide the room for their wider application in varied contexts of need as well as the formulation of modern versions of some proverbs.

Some other schools of thought refer to proverbs among other things as wise sayings that occur in speech and indicate levels of competence (Agyekum, 2013), a short saying usually unknown or of court origin that expresses useful, complete thought (Nsoh, et al, 2010). Nsoh et al (ibid) further explains that proverbs are the condensed forms of what is considered as an important truth in a culture. - the wit of one and the wisdom of many; and also the sayings of the wise (men) used to convey certain messages which reflect the norms and values of the society and are passed on to generations (Agbemabiase 2016 citing Russels, 1850). It is believed that any biases hidden in proverbs may affect the self-image of the individuals using it or upon whom they are used. This informs that portraying individuals in a way affect the images of such individuals in such cultures. Sekyi-Badu (2003) provides a componential analytical feature in the semantics for defining an elderly person. He asserts that the positive features for determining an elderly person are:

+ aged \*, + strong, + knowledgeable and understanding, + physically, socially, psychologically and legally responsible, + mature in body and mind, + behaviorally can tell apart good – bad/ right -wrong, + experienced, +

independent, + all knowing and + closer to God, ancestors and the gods. The explanation in the socio-cultural field may be different because what is culturally defined as experience, knowledge, age, adult and others per a setting varies drastically.

### 1.1 Related literature

The position and roles of proverbs among African and African languages is as old as the history of the people, the people themselves, their languages as well as their culture. It makes the people, their language and culture inseparable and indefinite. It is not surprising that most interpreted or unproven thoughts, concepts and wisdom of Africans are christened as myths, superstitions, primitive among others, all because of their proverbial nature and higher figurativeness. This is because every speech of the African (including Ewe speakers) is salted with proverbs and other figurative expressions. Though proverbs and studies on proverbs abound in Ewe, no critical study was done on how children and adults are portrayed in order to decipher who a child or adult is for the understanding of the culture and roles of such personalities among Ewes. Some works in relation to proverbs in Ewe include: *Anlo-Ewe: A functional analysis of the role of proverbs in traditional Anlo society* (Ladzekpo, 2014), *relevance, origin and genderisation of Ewe proverbs* (Agbemabiase, 2016), *Proverbs as images for textile designs* (Vigbedor et al, 2015), *proverbs and musicology in Ewe* (Gbolonyo, 2009). Some others were just a collection or compilation of some proverbs and wise sayings about the people. For instance, Dzobo (1997) collected 500 proverbs and classified them under 150 headings of moral lessons they taught. Agbenu (2010) also did some Ewe proverb collections and Anibri (2003) worked on 'Lāwo fe gbe -the voice of animals.' Other pockets of collected proverbs are also found in some manuscripts, novels and theses of students' works.

These texts from the orature and oral art concretize the facts that proverbs are important parts of life among Africans. They employ proverbs when interacting with one another through verbal and non-verbal means and the proverbs serve as the window through which their culture, traditions, beliefs, worldviews and wisdom are observed, established and interpreted. As an established oral art or genre in oral literature, literature has it that proverbs constitute one of the major linguistic activities and are crucial parts and paths of the oral traditions, oral literature and culture. It has been realised that when proverbs are critically analyzed, they show and share all characteristics similar to the genres of Oral Literature. The only difference is the uniqueness found in their contents and modes of performances, which exemplify the patterns of oral art and its communication dimensions in folk societies.

Some schools of thought observe that proverbs by form and genre are often religious; they usually reveal the worldview of a people and the totality of their belief systems and social values. This observation is also significant among the Ewe people. With regard to Ewes, it has been established that a large number of proverbs created by Ewes has a strict reservation to their worldview, daily life, experiences and their ways of survival in the journeys of life and migration adventures. Their sciences, occupations and culture as well as wisdom of life and its services are captured in proverbs. Proverbs are found in every society and some have common origins - (Mieder, 2008:11). Additionally, proverbs exhibit culture and regional specific qualities that give us competence in understanding, accepting and relating well with other cultures. According to Brosh (2013) citing Byram (1997, 2008), proverbs provide us with intercultural competence; which gives us the ability to interact with people from another culture in a foreign or common language. Brosh (ibid) explains that in this era of globalization, one must understand and be knowledgeable in one's own cultural background, religion and life experience, media and especially language; so as to understand a foreign culture, develop intercultural competence, function symbiotically, and play all roles fairly and firmly in the facets of the paradigms of globalization.

Proverbs hold facts about life for edification and entertainment. The assertions by Nsoh, et al, (2010) that proverbs are concise traditional statements of apparent truths with currency and age among the folk. Here, it could be explained that the currency and age deals with their usage over time in given contexts and situations. More elaborately, proverbs are short, generally known sentences of the folks that contain wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in metaphorical, fixed and memorisable forms and handed down from generation to generation. Nsoh, et al, (ibid) emphasise proverbs as simple and short sayings, widely known, often metaphorical, which expresses a basic truth or practical perceptions, based on common sense or cultural experience. They confirm proverbs have the ability to structure, define, portray, make up and reflect the cultural identity of a people, as well as shed lights of truth exclusively or universally on human life to a people. Significantly, proverbs exist as the medium of compositions, existence, storage and sharing of the core components of a society. They provide bridged linguistic and cultural barriers that help in establishing, fortifying, defending and explaining life and meanings of life throughout human history.

From the assertions of Nsoh, et al, (2010) in relation to this study, one can say that the common sense and cultural experience available for expressing a basic truth or practical perception and cultural identity hinges on how adults and children are portrayed in Ewe as revealed by their proverbs. A pantheon of scholars has a panoramic thought throughout history on what proverbs are and how to categorize, uniquely define and structure,

use and establish proverbs, yet little is known about proverbs' componential compositions and proverb comprehensional features that explain how features are portrayed and understood in a culture (Brosh 2013 citing Honeck, 1997, p. 276). Going further, Brosh (2013) (citing Bakalla, 1984; Penfield & Mary, 1988) says proverbs are viewed as brief sayings that present well-known truths; popular and familiar to all and passed on to us by our ancestors. These observations on proverbs and other relations portray proverbs as societies' ways of guiding their members toward acting in certain ways in order to emancipate and get relief from given difficulties within given situations (settings). They provide also advice and serve as stores of such knowledge or experiences for solving problems of such nature and their relations in the future. Naturally, proverbs portray and teach many values (Abadzivor, 2013), are applicable to many people and things, hence have a universal feature or appeal (Agyekum, 2013) of being common to many cultures. The long span of usage and the prolific usefulness of proverbs make them to have enduring capacity over the test of time, and a capability to manifest in many different life situations and forms as applicable to the needs. The varieties and variations in proverbs are due to their specifications and suitability in usage according to content, form, kind, age, structure and origin among others. This observation is splendid in understanding children and adults with regard to their roles and functions among the Ewe people.

## 1.2 Research questions

To familiarize oneself with the basic truth and practical perceptions on experiences and expressions regarding adult and child among the Ewe people, this study will be governed by the following questions:

1. How is 'adult or elder' or 'child' portrayed in Ewe proverbs?
2. How far has the portrayal reflected the culture and traditions of the Ewe people?
3. In what ways, do these images of adults or elders and children in Ewe proverbs affect roles and responsibilities in Ewe communities?

## 1.3 Methodology

This qualitative study adopted the descriptive survey approach in designing and defining the framework of the study. Additionally, active participant observation and native speaker intuition strategies helped in primary data collection and analysis processes. Some secondary data were collected from - Dzobo (1997), Nutsuakor (1998), Osei-Tutu (2003), Anibri (2003), Dogbey (2012), Ladzekpo (2014) and Agbemabiase (2016). In all, 316 proverbs were collected in relation to adult and child portrayals.

Data analysis was according to some thematic features portraying adults or children. Some inspirations were drawn from the "Logical Thematic theory of Gerhard Preyer and George Peter (2002; 2016), which helps in spelling out a schema for some themes and roles of agents in an event. Further inspirations were drawn from Akira Nakagaki (1987)'s *Thematic material effects* which emphasizes on 'viewer point' as a crucial factor in analyzing data involving descriptive and expressive components of a phenomena. These viewer point analogy and the logical thematic schema on components involved in constructing proverbs, their contexts of usage and function, the kinds of participants involved, and native speaker intuitions provide a buffer for in-depth analysis of the collected data from the sources believed to be portraying adults and children. The analysis and presentation of the reports on the findings is in logical narrative form.

## 1.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done to reflect and project the images, traits, meaning and socio-cultural roles of such proverbs and their components among the Ewe people.

1. *Ame mama metua xo na ame wobiala nyatefea ame dada o.*  
(One does not challenge and seek the truth behind historical sayings of grandparents from one's parents).  
In this proverb, the adult is projected or portrayed as a teacher, an instructor and the holder of the super truth or experience. Here, a child is to remain mute and accept without questioning or enquiry. The explanation by common sense in the proverb is that the grandparents are more mature and experienced than one's parents hence they know much more truth about a statement than one's parents.
2. *Togbewo fe gbe nue wosia gbe do*  
(We plough the ground as laid down by the ancestors)  
Literally, this means we clear bushes according to how our elders taught us). This portrays the adult folk as the model, example and pace setters for the young to follow. It means that a child must follow the footsteps of the elderly and comply with them. The significance of this can also be said to mean we emulate the ancestors in acts of lives. They are the images we bore and the media in which we exist and own our lives and acts. It further portrays the adult folk as the custodians of properties, truth, morality and wisdom. The use of the word 'togbe' refer to the ancestors, the dead. This means that the concept of adulthood goes beyond life on earth to the ancestral world. So we can presume that elders or adults

- comprise a certain class of the living and the dead. There is possibly a rating scale in determining one as an adult either in the ancestral or spiritual world or in the physical or worlds of the living. Obviously, it is showing that one can be old physically (adult) but not an elder amongst the Ewes.
3. *Ametsitsi fe bomee kpe nɔna wozia ne le edzi lena.*  
(It is in the farm of the elderly that we find stones to crack or break kernel).  
This also portray adults as stronger, the home and of all manner of wisdom and the solution for every thought or trouble confronting man. If you are looking for a stone (solution) for any problem, visit the farm of the adult or elderly (consult/contact the adults or elderly). This shows that children and peers do not have solutions to problems confronting them or the society but the adults. It means they own answers to the problems of life. The use of *ametsitsi* here denotes an old person hence an adult but of good moral sense and high literacy in his culture. The stone signify source of high level wisdom safety in the spiritual and physical field; to provide food to satisfy any spiritual or physical hunger. The kernel represents food as well as indicate the prolific roles of the palm tree amongst the Ewe people. Having the seed of the palm tree (the kernel) means one have all the numerous uses of the palm tree: the wine, the brooms, the fronds, the roots, the fruits (ripe or unripe or dry) as well as other physical and spiritual uses of the palm tree. The knowledge field represents the farm; hence in the farm of the elderly is where stones are found to crack kernels. Stones usage indicates the devices for interpreting words and actions for survival.
  4. *Fetriti mekɔna wua agbleto o.*  
(The okro plant cannot be taller than the farmer)  
This portrays adults as disciplinarians. Children are regarded as the okro plant who cannot violate or challenge the rules and authority of the elderly. The elders will bend them and deal with them and ensure they conform to whatever they desired them to be. Literally, the okro plant could be tall, anyway, but lacks the power to resist the touch and bend of the farmer. In other words, children could be formally educated, rich, in gainful employment and travel a lot but the elderly determines how they must take steps in life.
  5. *Dutikuku tae wotoa fe do* (One grows fingernails purposely for scratching an itchy body).
  6. *Vie nye fetsu na dzilawo.* (A child is the parents' fingernail).  
The proverbs in (5) and (6) portray the child or children as tools for attending to the needs of the adult. They are helpmates who provide benefits or run errands for them.  
Finger nails are used for scratching the itchy parts of the body. At times, adults go needy and they have to fall on the young for that answer. It also shows that the purpose of giving birth among the Ewes is to receive some care from them. Hence, parents or adults expect some values from children, which could be of benefit to them.
  7. *Vi nyanu nyea dzidzo na dzilawo*  
(A wise child is of pride to the parents).  
One major benefit of marriage among Ewes is reproduction hence they value children as very important components of the family. In this regard, childcare and training are collective responsibilities of parents and the immediate family members. A child of decent training is a pride to the parents and the family. This also shows that the pride and heritage of a child's decent behavior elevates the status of the parents in the society. Other proverbs regard 'child' as the 'fiakuku' (crown), *ɣletivi/ɣkeke ɣletivi* (the star/morning star), 'ɣku' (the eye) and 'nudonu xɔasiwo' (ornaments) among others for 'dzilawo' (parents/ family). These kinds of proverbs (*Vie nye fiakuku na dzila* = Child is the crown to his/her parents) metaphorically presents the child as the overall source of joy, wealth and happiness for the parents.
  8. *Vi wɔnute fee nya dzila fe dome*  
(A worthy child inherits the parents).  
In this context, children are directly regarded as the heirs of their parents and not any family member. This proverb explains the nature of the cultural system prevailing with regards to inheritance. It signifies that parents must work hard and leave something behind for their children to live on after they the parents are dead and gone. This also has a bearing on educating children on how to be worthy in taking good care of things inherited from their parents. It informs that children inherit both parents, mother and father. It shows a split in the human race among the Ewes as adults and children. It expects that every adult at a given age should play a responsible socio-personal role as an 'elder.' This is captured by data 5, 6, 7. The same applies to children who are expected to grow up to become responsible adults.
  9. *Dadi be vi fe nya, hufenyae eya tae yeylana le vidziyiwo kple gbɔɔyiwo.*  
(The cat says matters of birth are sacred so she hides before having sex and giving birth)  
This proverb portrays a child as a sacred and a religious item, something very mystical and worthy of

worship and care. It is a fact that it is very uncommon or even sacred to see cats mating or giving birth as compared to other mammals. The preciousness of the child to parents and family among the Ewes makes them to be portrayed in their proverbs. Oral narratives exist on the origin of children to parents among the Ewe people. They see children as they coming from 'Bomeno' (a spiritual mother) who even sent guardian angels and instructors such as 'gbetsi' 'ḡolimetasi', 'se' and others to take care of the child.

10. (i).-*Viho nyo wu gaho.* (ii).*Vi vɔ nyo wu atsufe gā*  
(i-The wealth of the child is better than the wealth of money/riches). (ii) - A bad child is better than a rosy marriage life  
This proverb accentuates the highest level of value placed on a child. It was seen in the previous proverbs that children were addressed as heirs, wealth, pride among others of the parents but this proverb categorically enlists and places the child as the most valuable entity above all among the Ewe people. This also shows that if you are rich or wealthy but do not have little children, you are equated to a pauper in the society. Also, if one is very poor but has many children, such a person is of much more valuable than a childless person in the Ewe culture and society, children are agents of joy and happiness.
11. *Vi vɔ nyo wu kotsisi* (Having a bad child is better than barrenness)  
The proverb portrays children as bad, but rated such bad children as far better than barrenness.
12. *Vi vɔ nyo wu atufu/atible gā.*  
(A bad child is better than a big scarf pampers)  
Among the Ewes, women carry their children (babies) at their back. They also carry all their wealth including monies, jewelry, gold and other ornaments in a scarf or cloth and tied on their buttocks to form a heap of wealth on their buttocks called *atufu* but when the lady wore it like pampers, then it is called *atible*. Women even carry it to look like if its a baby sitting at their back. This is what the proverb seems to be addressing by saying that no matter how bigger and valuable your *atufu* or *atible* is, it does not match to the value of a child. .
13. *Vi biao nya taa medzɔa lā o.*  
(A child who questions everything never becomes a fool)  
This proverb is portraying children as inquisitive and fact finding agents in the society. It is true that children do not tell lies, hide secrets or like to keep quiet over things that baffle their minds hence they question every occurrence for its meaning. Though adults easily deceive them by not telling them the true meaning of a phenomenon, they nevertheless provide funny stories and fairy tales to convince them. Children eventually become satisfied with such responses and abide by them.
14. *Ameléflea menɔa ame si tso ahatsikɔ wua ame o.*  
(One does not suffer from the thirst for liquor when there is someone to catch and sell).  
Despite the positive connotations and portrayals of children, some proverbs portray children negatively among the Ewe people. Proverb (12) sees children as commodities for sale or trade or agents for sacrifice. It presents the historical information of slavery, batter trading and other uncivilized forms of life when the white man invaded the African continent in the ancient times. It also shows that children are the immediate items of sacrifice should a need occur. In modern days, some parents give their children out to do manual jobs, hawk in the streets, be domestic and commercial servants and do other forms of labor nationally and international just to let their family have the basic needs.
15. *Vi si kuna dzila ηue xɔa ku de enu.*  
(A child that sticks to the parents, is sacrificed to save their lives).  
The child is portrayed as an agent of pacification, intercession and sacrifice in the place of parents or the elderly. It actually means that a child who has much love for the parents suffers much on behalf of the parents.
16. *Tsisiawo kple deviawo siaae sɔa ta wɔa nu.*  
(The aged and the young together perform a task)  
This shows the worldviews of the Ewes about the human race being a split between adults and children. It also shows that every adult has roles of children, and every child, has roles of adults to perform at one stage or the other in life. Performing such roles gives a status and recognition to the performer. It portrays that at a certain age, a child will grow and become an adult, then as an elder, he/she grows to become weak again to be like a child. A grown child (adult) who could not perform elder's roles is not regarded among the Ewes. He/she is more or less considered a nuisance. Abadzivor (2003) refer to adults as *amegbɔlofɔtsodumewo* – people who are apologies of God's creation.
17. *Vi mekɔa tɔa dzi be nekpɔ lāwo da o*  
(A child does not lift the father up to see herds of animals from afar.)  
Proverb (16) makes children objects of obedience, weakness and submissiveness. It means children are

- to remain mute and commit to all what the adults are saying. Children are also not strong enough to lift an adult up.
18. *Vi kaa akple gã mekaa nya gã o*  
(A child who can mould big balls of food in his palm cannot mold a big case/problem for solutions).  
This means a child is not mental strong to reason for solutions to problems that emanates. It portrays children as mentally weak in thinking deeper. Actually, children are portrayed as gluttons and those who live for eating prolifically without thinking of how to get the food or work for it.
  19. *Devi gbã abòbògo megbãa klogo o.*  
(A child who breaks the shells of a snail cannot breaks the shells of a tortoise).  
This also portrays children as weak. Literally, the tortoise shells are harder than that of snails, one cannot just step on it, and it will break or get smashed as in the case of the shells of a snail.
  20. *Womekpɔa nu gbɔ na vi o ke boŋ afo gbɔ ye wokpɔna ne.*  
(We don't see the lips of a child but the legs).  
This project a child as a gossip, an agent of errands running, a talkative and have no secretes or do not keep secretes. The proverb warns against children interrupting adults speech or revealing or talking about anything they see and hear. It addresses that a child shown be quicker or faster in running errands than in interrupting adults speech and activities.
  21. *Koklovi nɔ azime mekua atɔ o.*  
(A chick in an egg does not crow/ the unhatched chicken never crows)  
The proverb addresses children as ignorant and immature. They are rated as unhatched chicken, which cannot crow. This shows the level of understating adults have about children.
  22. *Vi do vu medoa yevevu o.*  
(A child, who is gifted in drum ensembles, cannot ensemble the yeve cult drum ensemble)  
The yeve drum ensemble is reserved for those who belong to the cult and uses the yeve esoteric language. No one is allowed to stage that drum ensemble, play it, or sing the songs for pleasure. Here the proverb portrays that not everything is permissible for a child to do; he is restricted to certain things only.
  23. *Devi de wokpɔa nu kple ŋku*  
(A child sees with only the eyes not hands).  
The proverb positions children as learners, observers, good listeners and obedient people. The value of the sense of sight is very paramount in this context. One must open his or her psychological and physical eyes (mind) to thoughts and acts before carrying them out or passing judgement on them.
  24. *Devi fe koklo nyɔnyɔ la, fu mevɔna le eŋu o.*  
(When a child de-feathers a fowl, a lot of feathers still remain on it).  
This proverb shows that a child can never be perfect or attain perfection as an adult. Here, children are portrayed as inexperienced, imperfect and a nonentity in success. It elaborates by establishing that children are inexperienced and imperfect in carrying out tasks successfully.
  25. *Vi dɛta, mewɔa tɔa nugbe o*  
(A child who resembles the father never acts/behaves like the father).  
The proverb shows that every Ewe child is unique in talent and behavior in Ewe culture; even if their physical appearances look similar, they still have their unique biological, attitudinal and psychological makeup.  
The data analysis that projects how adults and children are commonly attributed is displayed by Table 1. (key: + means the trait is present, - means the trait is absent)

Table 1: Traits on how adults and children are portrayed in Ewe

PROVERB	ATTRIBUE	
	Adult	child
1. Teachers/Instructors	+	-
2. Brave/fearless/shield	+	-
3. Custodians of truth, morality and wisdom:	+	-
4. Owners of properties, customs and traditions	+	-
5. Rulers /leaders/protectors	+	-
6. Full of Strength	+	-
7. Experience	+	-
8. Heirs	+	-
9. Religious/sacred item	+	-
10. Servants	-	+
11. Pride and Heritage	-	+
12. full of fear	-	+
13. agent of blame	-	+
14. Help mates	-	+
15. Agents of joy and happiness	-	+
16. Wealth/Commodities	-	+
17. Inquisitive	-	+
18. Commodities and tools	-	+
19. Objects of obedience and submission	-	+
20. Unreliable	-	+
21. Ignorant	-	+
22. Immature	-	+
23. Weak /delicate/vulnerable	-	+
24. Lower class citizens	-	+
25. Agents of sacrifice /collateral	-	+
26. Learners and observers	-	+
27. Consumers/Unproductive	-	+
28. Leaders	-	+
29. Bad	+	+
30. Restrictive		+
31. Experience		-

The data further reveal some other traits along which adults and children are equally portrayed in Ewe proverbs. These include qualities of prudence, secrecy, cautiousness, enormity of problems, avoidance, accomplishment, dependence, reliance, relevance in times of need, cooperation, advice, share experience, protection, benevolence, dynamism, teller of destiny, troublesome, source of universal truth, troublesome, incongruity, predictive, timeless in action, deprivation, content, commensurable, collective, social, and follows the universal truth, among others. The power of proverbs about these socio-cultural values makes people testify strongly about their value in shaping society in very significant ways.

### 1.5 Findings

The data analysis provide some thematic information around which adults and children are observed and defined as true components of the Ewe culture and society. It was revealed that one can be socially mature but culturally a child as revealed by the data. The concept of being literate among the Ewe people means one is ‘mature’ (an elder) in the culture and its practices. The concept of ‘literature’ among the Ewe people from this study is that of blending the words “literate + culture + architecture”, meaning one is literate in his culture and can use words from the language of the culture or components of the culture to build or design giant structure as how architects design and build structures. It signifies one is very knowledgeable in reading, writing and understands the ways of life of his people and can design and create other forms and structures from that culture using its knowledge. It is proven as using words to design, create and establish a genre about ‘life’ and some aspects. For instance, words are used to compose songs, stories, plays among others which become texts and genres for the people. The position of words as tools and aesthetic elements for revealing, portraying and creating the existence of a thing, event and situations or circumstances among the Ewe people is very much respected hence words and their usage among the Ewe people has an enviable position. It portrays culture, belief systems and the entirety of knowledge and understanding of past, present and future.



The findings revealed that for one to be recognized as an adult among the Ewe people, one must attain a certain chronological age with less regard to the psychological or cultural age and must be assumed to be capable of being responsible for himself or herself and aspects of the society. Among the Ewes, such adults must be culturally literate and productive for the culture and society. They must live a worthy life, marry and give birth, have a good occupation and reputation and be of a sound mind. He or she must be knowledgeable in the culture and the traditions of the people and satisfy all these qualities to be considered an elder (that is culturally mature). This is because one is believed at this stage to be responsible enough for himself, society, nature and others. Ancestors are also recognized as adults hence to be an ancestor; one must have all the qualities of an elder and die a natural death at a very appreciable old good age. One must not die of some diseases such as wounds, swellings, accidental deaths, dying at a younger age among others; which are regarded as shameful. In the Ewe society, elders are superior and the core of culture and society. They are custodians of wisdom, morality, knowledge and spirituality.

In Ewe culture, the core of the cultural hierarchy has the Omnipotent God, the gods, the ancestors, the elders, adults and women and children which is adequately shown by their proverbs. These are even regarded as the seven major cycles of life in some Ewe oral narrative and all these stages also has several sub-cycles defining several roles and responsibilities of members in that environment. However, the social hierarchy has the elders – adults – women and children. Culturally, a male child (of sound mind) is of a higher rank than an adult woman. When the literature of the people defines or recognizes one as having the social and cultural features of ‘literate’ or ‘literacy’ (according to the customs and traditions of the people), it means such a person lives in and with the culture and knows how to talk and use the sociocultural knowledge to solve problems in the society. It is portrayed that one can be an adult but not an elderly person and one can be an adult but be classified as a child. This interesting observation rated some women above men in the social structure among the Ewes. It is observed that to be elderly goes with a classified set of social and personal responsibilities. The data show, elders consider the satisfaction of the society first before their own personal needs. However, adults and children are seen to be concerned about themselves first before the society as shown in the attributes of the proverbs portraying them.

Again, in the context of Ewe proverbs, being ‘a child’ is metaphorically and contextually, referring to a measure of chronological age, participation, experience, location (eg. Ancestral world or physical world), knowledge capacity and productiveness. All living adults are children in the face of the ancestors and no matter how old one is; if one’s parents or grandparents are alive, one will only play roles as a child unless an elder delegates one to do so. The Ewe proverb ‘*Ta menɔa agbe klo ɔɔa kuku o*’ (The head cannot be alive and the hat will be worn on the knee) clearly signifies that. Also, being an adult goes far beyond chronological age; it includes attributes of proficiency and efficiency in performing acceptable sociocultural roles and responsibilities under given situations which society prides as very important or considers a mystery. Here, we have ‘irresponsible’ adults who are just adults without any capability to perform some basic cultural roles and we have adults endowed with skills and responsibility to play roles hence are elders. It could also be observed from the data that, a child by age with socio-cultural responsible roles is more an elder than an adult who lacks such socio-cultural skills and abilities to perform such roles. Males who are adults but not qualified to perform adult roles as enshrined in the Ewe culture are often portrayed as women, children or even non-entities in the cultural milieu. They are often regarded as *Amegbolo fo tso du me* which literally means “empty human among people or incomplete humans”. The data also revealed with regards to proverbs that men are rated high, when in their language usage, they speak less with deep wisdom or meaning and or hide or shorten the details of information pieces they give.

The concept of womanhood and for that matter ‘being a woman’ among Ewes from the data in this study, a woman is assumed to be and to an extent known to be plain in speech, talk much, quick in response or reacting and do not think critically especially about pros or cons before reacting. Being a child is much a receptive response as one is tutored or instructed to go strictly according to the cultural ways of life of the people. Any one behaving as such is regarded as either a woman or a child. The Ewe saying; *Ke ɔɔvia me ko nɛgale/ Ke nyɔnuwo dome ko nɛgale-* (So you are still in childhood/ So you are still among women) have confirm this about how children are portrayed alongside the elders in the society. Among the Ewe people, education and instructions for conformity is placed at the doorsteps of one’s parents, immediate family and relatives, then the entire elders in the social milieu. This make deviant behaviors to be easily identified, assessed and addressed.

In addition, the data reveals that adults are perceived as being superior in society; are sources and archives of information while children are receptors (minors) of such information. Portraying children culturally as such do not challenge them to explore and think critically or constructively. This might partially account for why some people still remain at ‘the physically adult and culturally child’ stages instead of becoming culturally adults or elders to become productive to the society. More often than not, we hear them say “Hmm, I am just a child; me a small child what will I do about ...?”, “I am new”, I am so and so ...among others”. The cultural schema of marking one a child or adult defines how the society views an adult or a child under some defined ‘social schema’ or features observed on them as well as the tasks they are obliged and expected to perform. Any

deficiency in such socio-cultural responsibilities lowers the scale of one's adulthood. This makes one society unique and different from the other in the way they define the classes of human components in a society. Even though such portrayal helps in marinating discipline and adherence to traditions, it paves way for false teaching and adulterations. Since our culture sees children as ignorant and immature, thus teaching them to be solely submissive and remain unchallenging to adult decisions and comments; any other culture or teaching which seems to give room or freedom for children and women to express themselves freely and equally to challenge or question the status quo within the sociocultural occurrences, will easily win such children and women to its side. Also, poor thinking and teachings could make some adults to refuse to play their expected adult and elderly roles thereby drifting to the scale of a child in the eyes of the society. The data thus portrays that attaining the age of adulthood qualifies one for the general role performance as an elder among the Ewes.

The ways children and adults are portrayed also affect productivity because roles and responsibilities in every society are defined by the cultural labels which the members bear and live by; in this case, proverbs as face threatening acts may enhance positive or negative face, which could be reflected in the behaviour of the individuals. When a saying stigmatizes a person, it affects behaviour and world view and such is seen in the use of proverbs as well. For example, the Ewe proverbs "*Ne nyɔnu kpɔ ga fle tu hã la, yutsu fe gli yu ko wòaziɛ do*" (Even if a woman is rich and buys a gun, she only leans it on the walls of the husband) and "*Nyɔnu kpɔ nu medoa agblɔuu o, etɔ koe nye atibla gã.*" (A rich woman never leads a war drum ensemble; hers is just a large menstrual pad.) These proverbs rate women as weak members of society who are dependent and cannot play any major roles of significance on their own except through their husbands or men, even though they are adults. In this consciousness, just like the way children are portrayed, it is realised that if a hardworking woman becomes aware of a teaching or a culture that promises and gives credence, definition and strength to a woman and acknowledges her to be potentially strong, independent and capable of carrying out her own duties freely and fairly, and if she wins credit for what she accomplishes; admiration and fame without having to ride at the back of men, she will easily ascribe to that culture and teachings and of course revolt against male chauvinism.

A popular saying usually accorded to the queen mother of Toghui Torgbo III of one of the Avenor divisions of the Ewe people says, – "*Dzayize be sesẽ maxasẽ, ne yutsu dzɔ atsu hesesẽ vuu hã la, nyɔnu fe aɖuɖze me ko wòmlɔna*" – "The hearbal pot says, a strength one must never boast of, no matter how giant, well built, strong and fearful a man is, he always sleeps in the chamber pot of a woman." This informs that some proverbs portray women and children as incapacitated in performing certain roles but in turn the overpower and remain more powerful than the men who labels them so.

## 1.6 Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to show how Ewe people portray adults and children in their use of proverbs and how the usage of proverbs affect the social structure. The study shows that being "an adult or elder" is highly ranked on the scale of preference among the Ewes though this dichotomy is not prejudiced "children" or "women" nor seen as a bias on the child but seen as efficiency in "performance and reasoning". This performance and reasoning is usually assessed and measured through the performance of a given sociocultural task. The fact is, a child is naturally different by physical and psychological makeup and cultural values must energize them to build themselves physically, think critically, explore, analyse and emancipate with conscience.

The paper takes a task stand that proverbs only report what is the truth. They are truthful in nature but their functions and effects often carry negative implications on participants. It takes a look that much wisdom and learning is found in negative connotations if a positive buffer type for one to observe and emulate. The structure, nature and content or components of Ewe proverbs define the norms, believes and behaviour of the people. This present a significant thematic and aesthetic realisations of the proverbs which can be used to observe the past, present and future lives of the people through the way adults and children are carved, portrayed and valued in the proverbs under study. It concludes, that discourse setting involving proverbs demand equity in chronological versus mental age and experience, status (economic, stature, strength etc) and others labels, which defines one as being a child or adult. It also affects roles and responsibilities in the society.

It emphasises that being an elder among Ewes is one's potency or capability to perform acceptable social or cultural roles perfectly. It explains that 'age' is metaphorical and does not necessarily show that one is an elder - (that equity in biological and psychological makeup) is the key. Attaining a good physical age may make one an adult citizen but a child in morality and cultural values. It shows also that, adults are children before the ancestors and the gods; and one can be an adult but not an elder and one can be an elder but not an ancestor in the social structure. It is seen that despite the believe that generally, proverbs actually reflect the culture and natural phenomenon of a people, contradictory proverbs also exist in languages and Ewe is not an exception. Portraying a child or adult positively or negatively is not permanence but a temporal and situational application of a conduct on a behaviour per a setting.

This further implies that any label negatively shaped on people such as children that they are subordinates,

inferior, immature, dependent, weak, timid among others tune them to become so, except there are some timely positive tendencies introduced to overcome such effects. Aside all these, children are seen as corporate parts of adults in society, without which adults are incomplete in their responsibilities toward themselves. The socio-cultural structure must therefore be built in children before they reach adult age so as not to give them low self-esteem but a drive to become elders. This could delve into name callings as well for names seems to portray and influence the ways we behave. This agrees with Russel (1850) in Agbemabiase (2016) that how one is constantly portrayed in speech transforms and immunizes one to be as such. It was also found that though adults and children are portrayed differently, it did not specifically make them the said persons they are portrayed to be but the context and situation of usage answers the efficacy of their effect at the time of discourse. This most often is temporal. Besides, the usage and portrayals are meant to enhance social cohesion, motivate one to work and succeed, and be submissive to the cultural norms and values of the people. This manifests in the findings that within every adult, is a trait of the child he or she ever was and within every child, are possible features of the adult he or she will become (See the proverb “agble si le nu wo ge la, xi mee wokpone le – *A crop that will yield well is seen in the growth of the seedling*); meaning the future of children are best observed in their childhood life styles and training.

Finally, Ewe proverbs legitimize the superiority of adults and men hence the visible supremacy of males over other genders of people. It concludes that the nature and use of proverbs (language) ‘in Ewe’ defines the socio-cultural structure, hierarchy and behavioral roles of members of the society. It spells out that garnishing the purposes of conversation for aesthetic purposes, providing a warehouse for culture and values, and for transmitting wisdom and morals from one generation to the other are the main functions and objectives of employing proverbs among the Ewe people. These go to support the views of Moshood (2016) who asserts that teaching or edifying or enlightening, entertaining and preserving are the significant roles played by any piece of art among humans. This emancipates one from a state of life to another with defined roles and responsibilities making proverbs irreplaceably, a mutual component of life and behavior in the acts and practices of the Ewe people.

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