

ETHNOGRAPHIC AND FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF TILAPIA NAMES AMONG THE EWE OF GHANA

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Abstract

Modern methods of rearing tilapia in recent years and the importation of same may have contributed to the increase in the consumption of tilapia in Ghana as a whole, particularly among the Ewe. Most organisms, including animals and fish, are named but they may not respond to their names as humans do. Observation also shows that consumers of tilapia are mostly conversant with the generic name of the fish and less interested in particularising the different species with their names. This paper seeks to investigate the essence of animal names with particular reference to tilapia among the Ewe of Ghana. The research questions that are germane to the study are the following: Does the composition of names of tilapia derive from their physical characteristics? What knowledge do the Ewe have about the names of tilapia and how does their knowledge influence the production, marketing and consumption of tilapia. The paper adopts a descriptive design approach in data collection and

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analysis. It establishes that the idiosyncrasies and general physical features of tilapia reflect in their naming system. The analysis also reveals that the names are both free and bound morphemes. The data further shows that geographical location, vocation, sex and age dynamics affect knowledge of the names of tilapia. These, to some extent, influence the production, marketing and consumption of the fish. The paper, therefore, concludes that even though organisms may not respond to their names, the names of those organisms, such as tilapia, are relevant to the people who ascribe these names to them.

Keywords: Tilapia, production, marketing, consumption, lexemes and morphemes

Introduction

This study is conducted among the Ewe people of Ghana who are found in the Volta Region of Ghana. Generally, the Ewe-speaking people include people living in south-eastern Ghana, southern Benin and the southern half of Togo. The people speak various dialects of the Ewe language, which belongs to the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family (Agbodeka, 1996). According to Gockel (2000), 75% of the Ewe population engages in crop production, agro-processing, livestock production and fishing. He stated that the economic activities of the people are tied to the available natural resources, citing their access to the Volta Lake, the sea and other minor bodies of water, including individual ponds that abound with freshwater fish as examples. Gockel further informs that various types of fish, including tilapia, are caught and processed for both domestic and oversea markets. Fish farming, marketing and consumption have been reported as increasing in the region and tilapia rearing, in particular, seems to be a lucrative venture or vocation in recent times (<https://globalseafood.org>. Retrieved, 01/09/2022). Growth and interest in tilapia farming have been attributed to various reasons such as the massive support from governments, conducive weather condition, the quality of the water bodies and the availability of market for the fish (<https://pricesghana.com/>. Retrieved, 01/09/2022). Global Seafood Alliance further notes that fish intake in Ghana constitutes about 6% of the total animal protein intake and that there is an increase in the development of fast-growing strains of tilapia in Ghana. WFA Report (2018) and FAO (2010) indicate that tilapia is a delicacy of the Ghanaian, and as a result, there is an increase in its production and marketing

(Myjoyonline.com. Retrieved October 2018). These reports suggest that domestic consumption of tilapia, in particular, is on the increase (Frimpong & Fynn, 2011). It is also noted that tilapia is highly patronised in the cuisines of hotels, restaurants and other eating places largely for its taste. It is no wonder that the fish has become an important mark of hospitality to the Ghanaians.

This notwithstanding, available literature on tilapia does not show if the preference for types of tilapia production, marketing and consumption is based on the various names of the fish. That is, there is no information on whether the names of the tilapia types influence its farming, which one people often buy and sell, and which one people consume at the various eateries. The present study, therefore, selected seven major locations that are involved in the production and marketing of tilapia, namely, Ho, Kpando, Kpeve, Sogakope, Sokpoe, Agbozume and Anloga in the Volta Region, to ascertain the etymology of the various tilapia names and whether there is any relationship between knowledge of the names and the production, marketing and consumption of the fish.

Naming practices

Generally, naming is critical to a people insofar as it expresses their views about their world. Therefore, the science of naming, describing and classifying organisms (taxonomy) is important to most cultures, including the Ewe. It is also important to note that naming, as observed, involves taxonomic processes as well as morphological, behavioural, genetic and biochemical observation, in that the concept of classification and nomenclature basically determines the categorisation of organisms by their names (Berlin, 2008). That is, all identifiable groupings of organisms can be described with names. From a linguistic point of view, root names and derived names can be used to show distinctions and classes of animals. These lexemes are composed of endocentric and exocentric compounds typically based on permanent and non-permanent characteristics of the named (Aziaku, 2016; Berlin, 2008; Ellen, 1993).

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to establish the semantic values of tilapia names within the contexts of the economic and socio-cultural life of the Ewe. To explain the relationship between people and their language, in this case, the Ewe, a sociolinguistic approach has been adopted. In this respect, elements such as sex, education, occupation and social

network that reflect naming practices have been considered as the main variables for data collection and analysis (Agyekum, 2006).

Methodology

The study is mainly qualitative, aimed at assessing the knowledge of producers, marketers and consumers on tilapia names. The study also ascertained the relevance of the names to the people. As indicated earlier in the introductory part of the study, the Ewe people can be found in almost all the administrative regions in Ghana, but Ho, Kpando, Kpeve, Sogakope, Sokpoe, Agbozume and Anloga were earmarked for the study. These sites were chosen due to the resources available for fish production as well as marketing. The researchers selected a total of 80 participants for the study since the research is largely qualitative. The breakdown was as follows: fishermen 20, fishmongers 20 and lay people 40. The population consists of men, women, boys and girls. The participants were in two categories: people whose vocations are related to fishing and marketing and people who are not directly involved in fishing and fishmongering. The respondents for the study were selected from the three major subgroups of Ewe known for the production and marketing of fish, particularly tilapia. The selection of the respondents was based on their number of years in fish marketing and/or production, premised on the assumption that the longer the period in the business, the better and greater the experience and consequently the level of knowledge about fish in general and tilapia in particular. In addition to fishing hubs and marketing centres located in these towns, popular restaurants and food joints where tilapia is served were covered. Here, indigenous Ewe people who regularly patronise these places were selected with the assistance of the food vendors. Due to the busy schedules of the respondents as well as the inability of most of them to read and write, a guided interview was conducted to collect the data. Osuala (2005) indicates that purposive sampling gives a high percentage assurance to the researcher of the number and competence of the respondents. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) stressed that criterion sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling, tends to provide large amounts of information; hence, it was considered an appropriate technique for this linguistic study.

Typology of Ewe names

The language of a people, in general, and Ewe, in particular, reflects their activities, vocations, livelihood and social status (Agbedor & Johnson, 2005; Agyekum, 2006). The environment or the 'natural world' and all its components (rivers, land etc.) that support the lives of the Ewe, for example, are all relevant in the determination of the relationship between their language and naming practices. It is worth noting that the social ties between the Ewe and people of different language backgrounds, cultural orientations and historical events in diverse ways also account for the different types of names that humans and other organisms bear.

Aziaku (2016), Stekauer (2016) and Atakpa (1997) have individually explained that naming is instinctively performed, and most names reveal the culture of a people, including their conception of the environment. The names and naming processes of the Ewe are intrinsically linked to their worldview. Abadzivor (2007) identified the various categories of Ewe names as including day names, circumstantial names, belief names and clan names of the individual. Atakpa (1997), in his explanation of naming practices of the Ewe, indicated two major types: root names and derived names. He further categorised root names as primary names or arbitrary names. He explained that arbitrary names are free morphemes in the sense that their morphological composition does not depend on an existing name or word unlike their counterpart, the derived name. Aziaku (2016), whose work corroborated Atakpa's finding, posited that names that obliterate their word boundaries do not lend themselves to easy interpretation.

Egblewogbe (1977) also identified the following types of Ewe personal names: *dzɔdzɔmɛŋkɔwo* 'birthday names', *ŋkɔtsɔtsɔwo* 'names taken later in life', *ŋkɔnanawo*, 'other names given at birth and later' and *subɔsubɔŋkɔwo* 'religious names'. Agbedor and Johnson (2005) explained that African personal names possess an elaborate linguistic structure, complex semantic content and relate to African value systems. The implication is that Ewe names have both socio-cultural denotations and connotations. Even though Atakpa (1997) emphasised the arbitrariness of root names, the author acknowledged that one needs to possess some knowledge the Ewe naming system to enable the one to single out what the name means in order to use such names appropriately.

One could argue that Atakpa (1997) and Agbedor and Johnson (2005) agreed that Ewe personal names in particular and by extension most African names are not arbitrary labels but socio-cultural tags that have sociocultural functions and meanings. Clearly, the understanding of African names and, for that matter, Ewe names depends on one's knowledge of the African, their events and their environment, since these names have distinctive sociological, psychological as well as cultural elements or undertones. Generally, names serve as identity markers for the individuals who bear them (Agbedor & Johnson, 2005). Naming is, thus, a way of distinguishing one individual from the other.

Tilapia names may not be constructed based on all the factors that characterise human names among the Ewe as explained above. For example, tilapia names cannot be derived from their birth days or bear any clan names nor religious names even though they may have religious relevance. What may be appropriate to the present study on the tilapia naming system among the Ewe would be Aziaku's (2016) study on animal names, that indicates that animal names are constructed based on the habitation, appearance, nature of the animals, on one hand, and the worldview of a people, on the other hand.

Fish names among the Ewe

In Aziaku's view, fish names are similarly constructed to reflect precincts, behaviour and worldview of a people. He based this argument on the Ewe fish naming system. Among the Ewe of Ghana, fish is generally known as *ɔmelã*. The word *ɔme* defines water body as a location and *lã* as a generic term that is used to describe any animal. Therefore, *ɔmelã* literally means *a river animal*, expressing the habitation of this category of animals. The name, as it stands, includes also marine mammals, and delineation of the marine mammals from fish becomes necessary only in specific situations. It is important to clarify that among the Eveme people (known as inland Ewe) of Ghana, *akpa* is equivalent to fish (Ansre, 2000). Tilapia, the focus of this study, is, however, nicknamed by a section of the Eveme people as *dzeanyikpla*, which connotes a heavy fall. This describes the wrangling of a suffocating fish at a landing site. The names as explained generally reveal certain descriptive features which are relevant in the determination and categorisation of the fish. This paper principally establishes the economic

and sociocultural values that come to play in naming the different tilapia species and their relevance in the production, marketing and consumption of tilapia.

Results and Discussion

The section analyses the economic and sociocultural values in respect of Ewe tilapia names, morphological structure of the names as well as the knowledge level of fishers, sellers, lay people and members of their networks in naming the different tilapia species.

Sociolinguistic analysis of the names

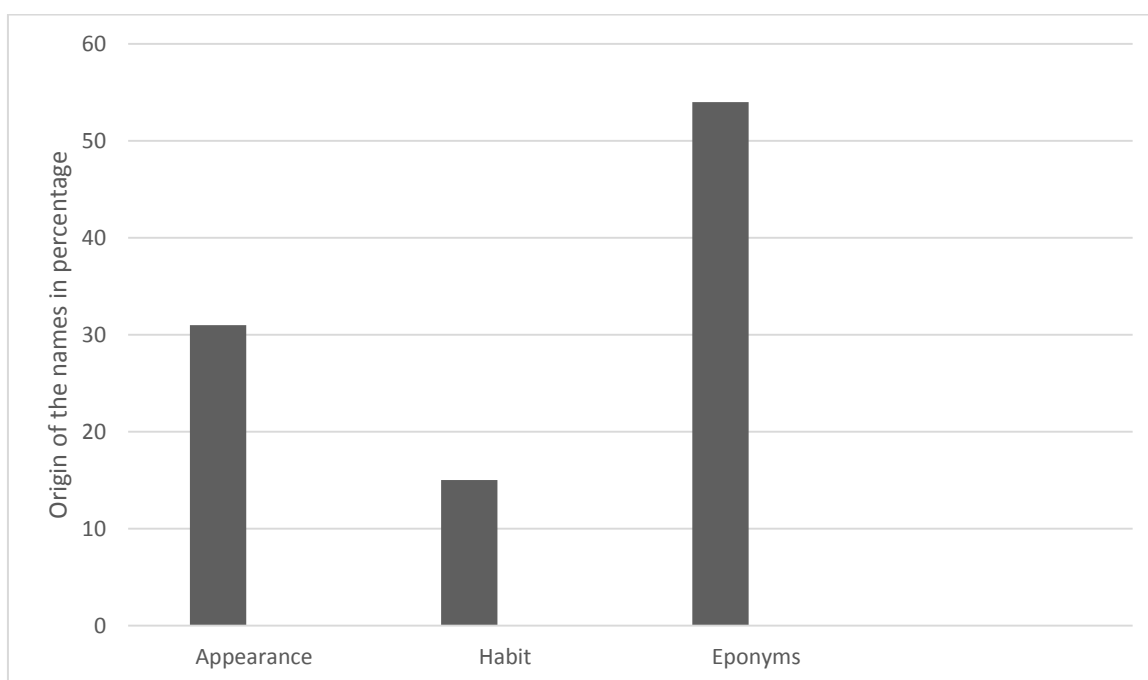
This part of the paper focuses on the sociolinguistic factors that influence the origination and use of tilapia names. These include knowledge level of the respondents on tilapia names and the influence of tilapia names on its production, marketing and consumption. The last section of the discussion provides a linguistic insight on tilapia names.

The origination of tilapia names

Akpakpo (*longfin tilapia*) describes the stature of the fish. The name is a combination of the generic name, *akpa*, plus *kpo*, meaning short and thick. The name, *akpafiatsi* (*nile tilapia*) is constructed based on its movement in water. That is, *akpa*, generic name of tilapia plus *fia*, bubbles, *tsi*, water. The name translates “the fish that bubbles”. The name *bɔyi* (*banded jewelfish*) can be analysed as *bɔ* plus *yi*. The fish *bɔyi* is likened to lobster which is also referred to as *bɔ*. *Yi* in *bɔyi* is, therefore, the corruption of *vi*, white. It is a common practice among the Ewe to use some sounds interchangeably. For example, the word *veyivi* (*period*) is pronounced as *veyiyi*. Hence, *bɔvi* describes the appearance of the banded jewelfish which has a whitish belly. *Logo-kpa/Akpaxie/ Gbolonu* (*mango tilapia*). The name *logo-kpa* is an eponym where the tilapia is associated with *logo* a “common white grouper” as a result of its resemblance. The second name, *akpaxie*, means white tilapia. It is descriptive of the appearance of the fish. *Gbolonu* associates the fish with prostitution due to its commonness. *Gbolo* in Ewe signifies prostitution and the suffix *nu* is “thing”. *Akpanɔe* (*blackchin tilapia*). The morpheme *nɔ* marks the female sex of the tilapia. Thus, the suffix *nɔ* and the diminutive marker *e* define the sex and

size of the fish. *Akpasila* (*tilapia busumana*) is a combination of *sil*a and *akpa* which is the generic name for this type of tilapia. However, the source and meaning of *sil*a remains unclear aside from speculation that the fish name is a corruption of its scientific name *Zilli*. *Akpaŋɔye* (*spotted tilapia*), conspicuously emanates from the name *akpa* ‘generic name for tilapia’ + ɲɔ[ɲɔ], ‘spotted’+ ye, nominaliser. The name, therefore, translates as a “spotted tilapia”. The modifier ɲɔ[ɲɔ]ye or ɲɔɲɔɔ “spotted” in English is clipped. Clipping is a productive word formation process in Eve naming practice (Agbedor & Johnson, 2005). The diagram below illustrates the knowledge levels of tilapia names.

Chart 1: Origin of the indigenous tilapia names



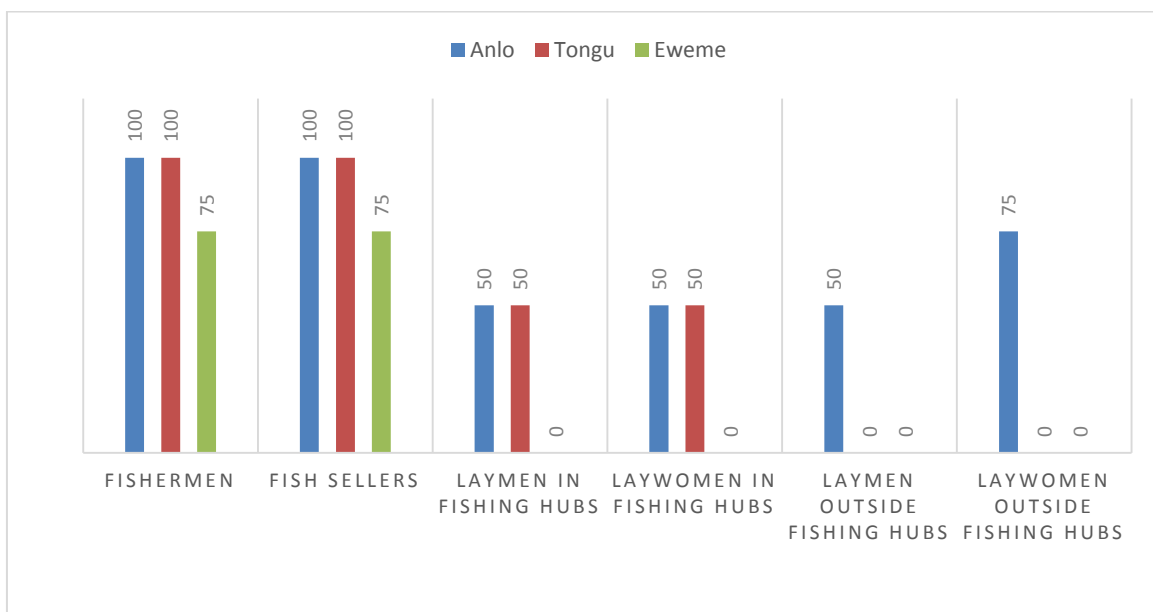
The names are derived mainly from eponyms, appearance and the habits of the fish. Eponymous derivations generally are linked to anthroponyms and toponyms. In cases where things are named after persons, these persons serve as the creator of those things (Trahair, 1990). For example, *akpasila*, obtained its name from its ‘founder’, *Zilli*, a German Scientist. This name is corrupted and became *sil*a, hence, the fish’s name, *akpasila*. Another eponymous tilapia name is *gbolonu*. A linguistic metaphor is evoked here to liken the commonality of the

fish to the traits of a prostitute known in Eve as *gbolo*. The percentage of eponyms on the chart implies things and other fish species serve as resources of eponyms. The chart shows that size and colour shades underlie names that are based on appearance of the fish. These are ingrained characteristics of the fish as observed by Ellen (1993). The habits or behavioural patterns of fish in their natural environment are also important in the Eve naming practice of tilapia. It is revealed that on the average, fifteen percent of the names were constructed from these behavioural patterns.

Distribution of knowledge levels of tilapia names

Fish and fishery products serve as a source of food to people worldwide and there is an increase in world per capita fish consumption (FAO, 2012 report, <https://thefishsite.com> Retrieved September, 2022). In Ghana, fishing and aquaculture have grown greatly and it appeared a lot more Ghanaians have been exposed to tilapia consumption (Frimpong & Fynn, 2011). It is, therefore, important that the paper assesses the knowledge levels of people who dwell both outside and inside fishing communities to ascertain their understanding and effective use of fish names. The histogram below shows the knowledge levels of respondents on tilapia names:

Chart 2: Knowledge levels in percentage



The graph shows that fishermen and fish sellers are more conversant with tilapia names than non-fisher folks who live in the same communities. As indicated, the Eweme people are more engaged in crop farming than fishing. This and the geographical location of the people may, therefore, explain the low score regarding knowledge of names of tilapia as compared to the scores of the Aŋlo and Tɔŋu. The low performance of Tɔŋu and Eweme men outside fishing hubs can be attributed to elements of the Ewe socio-cultural system. Generally, the Ewe culture frowns upon men buying fish directly from the market or engaging in culinary activities in the home; hence, they may not show interest in tilapia names. Indeed, research to determine the knowledge level between men and women on natural resources found that women in India, for example, possessed a wider range of knowledge about the use and conservation of natural resources than men (Huisinga et al., cited in Aziaku, 2016, p.154). This may also explain the reason lay women (non-fishmongers) hold an appreciably greater knowledge level of tilapia names than the laymen who are not fishermen.

Influence of tilapia names on its production, marketing, and consumption

A major quest of the research was to ascertain the impact that the knowledge of tilapia names of the Ewe has on its production, marketing and consumption. The study revealed that an appreciable number of men and women in the tilapia business are knowledgeable on the morphological and genetic characteristics and names of tilapia. Respondents also emphasised that with the advancement in preservation technology of fish, in general, the issue of preservation of the fish may not be seriously relevant anymore; however, one cannot ignore its role in the marketing and consumption of the fish.

Production

Fish farming via cage farming in the Volta Lake and pond fish farming, as indicated previously, has increased in Ghana. Fish production in Ghana is supported by the government to purposely increase fish yield in the country. The question this research attempts to answer in respect of fish production is whether knowledge in tilapia names, particularly, play any role in the identification of tilapia species for production. Indeed, producers of tilapia fingerlings specify a particular species that can grow in the country, hence, the name. As pointed out earlier in this

paper, the name *gbolonu* signifies its availability in both large and small water bodies. Thus, it is known to survive and grow well in most water bodies in Ghana. Coincidentally, *gbolonu* is the preferred tilapia fingerlings and most farmers are au fait with its name, and the reason for the choice is its fast growth. The respondents were consistent that the name helps in identifying the various species.

Marketing

As indicated earlier, the study shows that many people in the business of tilapia are conversant with the morphological and genetic characteristics of the fish. Similarly, both fishermen and fishmongers possess an appreciable level of knowledge in fish names. Again, either the name or appearance is used to determine the fish that will last longer or stay fresh or longer outside water. Thus, they are very much aware that since the redbelly tilapia (*akpasila*) is “stronger” (it stays fresh outside its habitat longer) than the spotted tilapia (*akpanɔye*), it is more prudent to quickly offer the latter first for sale or preserve it more securely to prevent it from rotting/decay. The marketing strategies identified above do not seem to be relevant in the case of *akpatsu* and *akpanɔe*. This means that retailers do not worry about when to offer *akpatsu* for sale. In all, the Nile tilapia, *Blackchin* (*akpanɔe*) tilapia is best for grilling and the redbelly tilapia (*akpasila*) for processing into salted fish (*koobi*). Hence, the demand for the blackchin is higher. In places where the fish is not reared, the retailers have to make do with the available tilapia fish.

Consumption

As far as preference and consumption patterns are concerned, the study revealed that those in the fishing hub (fishermen and fishmongers) are selective of the type of tilapia they consume. Most consumers strongly agreed that some tilapia species are more luscious than others; thus, the consumption pattern and choice tilted towards these tilapia species. This explains the reason fishermen and fishmongers are selective of the type of tilapia they consume. Among the variety of tilapia that has been discussed, the Nile tilapia, *Blackchin* (*akpanɔe*) tilapia is the favourite in the cuisine of many people. Largely, the taste and how “meaty” the tilapia type is

determine the choice that many of the consumers make. In this case, knowledge of the fish name plays a less significant role.

Linguistic insight on tilapia names

The Eve tilapia names composed of free and derivational morphemes, categorized as simple, compound and complex lexemes. These names, in another way, can be categorised as endocentric, exocentric, copulative and appositional compounds having either left- or right-headedness.

Simple lexeme

The simple lexemes constitute semantically unanalysable lexemes. That is, the names are mainly formed from morphemes that are described as root names (Atakpa, 1997; Ofori, 2002). This formation consists of non-segmentable units. The simple lexeme defined in this paper is the generic name of tilapia, *akpa*. The name *akpa* falls within the category of root names or primary names (Agbedor & Johnson, 2005; Atakpa, 1997). According to Matthews (2012), root names belong to *lexeme a* category since they exist prior to any derivation.

Compound lexemes

These are analysable lexemes which, in this paper, refer to tilapia names that are constructed based on two existing words analysable into obvious segments of words as exemplified below:

gbolonu	→	[gbolo] _{sub} + [nu] _{pro}	Mango tilapia
bɔyi	→	[bɔ] _{sub} + [yi] _{sub}	Mango tilapia
logo	→	[lo] _{sub} + [go] _{sub}	Mango tilapia

It is observed that the compounds offered as examples in this section are a combination of substantives and their compositions fall within the category of exocentric compounds in that no aspect refers to the referent.

Complex lexemes

Generally, in this kind of formation, a stem that can be either the generic name and/or an eponym is affixed to a verb and its object or modifier. The generic name forms a recognisable constituent (Berlin, 2008). Atakpa (1997) and Berlin (2008) view the technique as a productive name formation process. The names underscore the lexeme *a* and *b* concept proposed by Matthews (2012). He observes that in compound word formations, a lexeme which he labeled as *lexeme a* synchronically exists before *lexeme b*. Lexeme *b* then is the output of lexeme *a* plus any morpheme. In the data on tilapia names, it is noted that a constituent which is the generic name *akpa* shows superordinate category of the fish and can be defined as lexeme *a*. These syntactic compounds have their syntactic heads and largely endocentric compounds that point to an expressed semantic head. The *lexeme b* category is rather a mix of substantives and other particles. These lexical derivations can be represented as follows:

X_N	→	$[X_{sub} + X_{suffix}]$.
akpakpo	→	$[akpa]_{sub} + [kpo]_{suffix}$	Longfin tilapia (<i>Oreochromis macrochir</i>)
akpafiatsi	→	$[akpa]_{sub} + [fia]_{verb} + [tsi]_{obj/suffix}$	Nile tilapia (<i>Oreochromis niloticus niloticus</i>)
akpatsu	→	$[akpa]_{sub} + [tsu]_{suffix}$	Guenther's Mouthbrooder (<i>Pelmatochromis guentheri</i>)
akpasila	→	$[akpa]_{sub} + [sila]_{sub}]_{suffix}$	Redbelly tilapia (<i>Tilapia zilli</i>)
akpanɔɛ	→	$[akpa]_{sub} + [nɔɛ]_{adj.Nom/suffix}$	Blackchin tilapia (<i>Sarotherodon melanotheron</i>)
akpanɔye	→	$[akpa]_{sub} + [nɔye]_{adj.Nom/suffix}$	Spotted tilapia (<i>Tilapia mariae</i>)
akpavie	→	$[akpa]_{sub} + [vie]_{adj/suffix}$	Mango tilapia (<i>Sarotherodon galilaeus</i>)
logokpa	→	$[logo]_{prefix} + [[a]kpa]_{sub}$	Mango tilapia (<i>Sarotherodon galilaeus</i>)

Conclusion

Names in Ewe possess certain characteristics that are relevant in the determination and categorisation of the referent. However, Ewe tilapia names are 54 percent eponymous, with about 32 percent of the names based on appearances. It is worth noting that this finding in respect of characteristics of Ewe names slightly contrasts the finding of Aziaku (2016) that most animal names describe appearance, behaviour and habitat of the animals. In this paper, most of the names are linguistically associational, and in compound formation, the names are combined with the generic name of tilapia *akpa*. Hence, the names are largely endocentric compounds. The analysis reveals that both free and bound morphemes characterise forms of the names. The paper also determines the relevance of the naming concepts in the production, marketing and consumption of tilapia. It was revealed that the quality of each fish is known to the dealers and the tilapia names appear in their discourse. However, the size and colour of the fish are important in tilapia production, marketing and consumption more than the names. The study tested the knowledge level of the participants on tilapia names. Here, it is worth noting that the knowledge levels of the participants of tilapia names vary significantly; this is largely attributed to the geographical location, vocation and gender differentiation of the participants. In some way, the knowledge of the people about the fish influences production, methods of marketing and consumption of the tilapia fish. The paper corroborates the assertion that some organisms do not respond to their names; however, the names of those organisms including tilapia are useful to people in many ways.

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