



## **The Language of Weaving, Mat Production Processes and Usages in Ewe**

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### **Authors' Contributions**

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors.  
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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper employs the lexical semantics approach in discussing mat production processes and mat usage expressions in Ewe. Though lexical forms are best meaningful in context, words possess inherent meaning bases (hidden information) if in isolation. Equally, expressions stem from activities and engagements anchored on given features; leading to names and naming within given domains in a language and culture. How these expressions should be used is situated in given forms and contexts across languages and mat issues in Ewe are no exceptions. Data for this qualitative study were primary, from a purposive sample of twenty consultants; who were observed and interviewed. Discussions and native speaker intuitions equally control data collection, analysis and interpretation processes. The findings show that meaning processes, sources, nature and usages of expressions come objectively under four meaning-based modules: propositional, expressive, presupposed and evoked meanings. It also involves the descriptions of the nature of materials, processes, activities, tools, skills and experiences of weavers, and the purpose of usage. How the weaver and users engage the material among others generate defined meaning forms and expressions on mats. The study concludes that human actions and thoughts generate descriptions of phenomena; birthing forms and meaning diversities across contexts; the wider the usage domain of an expression, the more varied the meanings amongst a people.

**Keywords:** Ewe, expressions, lexical semantics, mat, meaning, production process and usages

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## INTRODUCTION

Every human activity has some specific expressions associated with it. These expressions are mostly descriptive or arbitrary in a way, contributing to the meaning, relevance and effectiveness in usage across contexts; meaning relations or extensions, senses, figurativeness and etymology among others. The descriptive nature of expressions surrounding activities considers manner, process, duration, tools and the techniques involved in the actions and thoughts being expressed. Dogbey (2020) says comments on activities are usually about what is done, how, when and why it is done, the agents involved, the outcome and consequences and other justifying reasons. In the views of Aziaku (2016), there is a meaning component in every human expression, and the meaning of any expression may depend largely on the meaning of individual words that make up the expression and the kind of activity engagements that birth the expression. Dogbey, Mbithi, Kpodo and Macharia (2021) also position that words and products are components and combinations of the kinds of activities available for people and how they are described in a given sociocultural setting; the products of such activities, their effect on the participating agents, the outcomes and experiences gained enables the functionality of those works with the people. They also found that experiences, imaginations and information about items, objects and their usages amongst a people for given purposes, at a time or in a context, produces varied expressions, terminologies and assertions as well as influences the context of usage and participants due to various meanings emanating from the usage. These emanations become the lexical forms that come into existence due to some assigned semantic features. The subfield of linguistic semantics referred to as lexical semantics,

is associated with the study of word forms, meanings and expressions. Lexical fields are denoted by segments of realities symbolized by sets of related expressions or words. These words in semantic fields share common semantic properties for given roles. Most often, the fields are defined by subject matters and domains in vice versa and they also have hidden meanings behind their surface usage. Dogbey (2020) says words, terminologies or expressions always have some hidden meanings most of which are stories behind activities and thoughts behind the birth of that word, term or expression in the language. This most often births figurativeness and indirections in languages.

According to Cruse (1986), expressions occur for a given domain with a given subject matter and function; carrying unique or definite meanings; the meaning surrounding an expression depends on the specific speech community and the interpretations assigned to given activities and thoughts in a time. The speech community and domain in focus here is the Ewe people and their traditional mat weaving activities and the expressions surrounding mat production and usage. Adjei (2013), Ameka and Essegbey (2008), and Capo (1991) all affirm that Ewe belongs to the Kwa Language group of the Niger-Congo cluster of the Gbe language family and language has several dialects spoken in Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria. They observe that all these nations have their dialects of the Ewe and there are other dialects within these divisions with their unique semantic effects around thoughts and actions across contexts. These contribute to given variations in the language.

Semantic effects cover every aspect of life, survival and everyday activities consciously or unconsciously. In the views of Dogbey (2021), every activity engaged in by man is governed by process, manner, purpose and economic value; hence

expressions equally exist and function alongside these formulae. We can say weaving is not an exception among these activities. The Ewe people worldwide engage in various types of traditional occupations, and weaving stands out as one of their common occupations (Ofori, 2008). The Ewe people weave cloth, baskets, bags, nets, mats, containers, roofing materials, sieves and many more. They use reeds, palm leaves and fronds, mangrove, coconut leaves and branches, canes, barks and roots of given trees, threads or ropes and many more. The types of items woven in an area depend largely on the types of raw materials available in that geographical area, the needs and the economic importance of that item to the people and elsewhere. The focus of this study is mainly on expressions involving or within the *Anlo* or Anlo dialect zones of Ewe people relevant to mat production and usage. The Anloland is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean and the Keta Lagoon, which is the spillage of the Volta River and the Volta Lake. Within the Keta Lagoon and its areas of flow grows the various grasses used in mat weaving. The communities living along the lower Volta basin engage in the production of various types of mats and other woven things using the raw materials from the lagoon and its flood flow paths. Some mats from these mat-weaving grasses include tare; *ketiba* 'reed mat', *tsatsa* 'sedge mat', *avaba/ aflagba* 'straw mat' among others.

There are several expressions involving mat in varied contexts. These expressions occupy special places in the culture, philosophy, literature and linguistics of the Ewe people; speaking volumes about their worldview and general ways of life. According to Sowah (2008), the phenomenological interpretations that humans construct around things establish their knowledge and values on the phenomenon in focus. These interpretations

are descriptions that generate expressions or words serving as derivation that help in interpreting some cultural experiences and activities. Some of such expressions are used during, after and even before the main activities and its related ones are performed. Some of the expressions are either figurative in nature or extended forms. For instance, it is found in the data that the expression *no aba nu* has different meanings away from the concept of just sitting at the edge of a mat. It metaphorically refers to the practice in widowhood where a widow sits at the edge of a bed laid in front of her dead husband when the man is laid in state. It is done to prove her chastity and faithfulness of the woman to the deceased husband in his lifetime. Also, *siabalõnu* as used in mat production is different from cutting other grasses which are not for producing a mat. This informs that expressions could be fixed and context-bound or situationally defined. Furthermore, the discourse of expressions seems to feature properties of meanings surrounding activities in a specific culture and their relations to other extensions or specificity to a particular event, activity, object or phenomenon. In this paper, the focus is on mat production and mat usage activities and their expressions among the Ewe people.

Expressions surrounding mat production and usage communicate deep cultural and linguistic knowledge around such engagements. These engagements are descriptions surrounding activities and thoughts of the people and most of these engagements are grey areas with negligible academic research. One significant issue affecting many developing nations' cultures is the drifting away of their youth from their traditional activities and practices and since language and cultural practices go hand in hand the drifting away from cultural practices results in the loss of given linguistic terms and expressions associated

with the practice, Dogbey (2021) states that language goes hand in hand with cultural practices hence the absence of the culture and its practices which in this study involves mat signifies that the expressions surrounding mat also diminish with the less usage and economic importance attached to it by the people. The study is therefore positioned to interrogate expressions associated with mat production and usage among the Ewe people. Mat is found to be of a higher cultural and linguistic relevance to the people hence meanings and interpretations surrounding mat need to be explored across contexts.

## METHODOLOGY

Data were purposively collected from fourteen consultants from four selected communities who engage in mat weaving, mat selling and usage activities. The people are from communities within the Anlo and Keta enclaves of the Volta Region. Their ages range between 15 to 70 years. The communities are Agbatsivi, Agotoe, Hatorgodo and Atiavi. Observations, interviews and oral discussions were used to elicit data coupled with native speaker intuitions and data were interpreted through a constructive narrative approach.

## FINDINGS AND RESULTS ANALYSIS

The section categorizes expressions associated with mat under pre-production, production, and post-production stages contexts. Tables 1 to 3 show the grouping of expressions and their meanings. Discussions on the expressions also cover cultural values and other important attachments about mat production and mat usage.

**Table 1:**  
*Expressions involving mat at the pre-production stage*

| English gloss (literal meaning) | Ewe expressions                  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| weed mat production materials   | siabalõnuwo                      |
| scrap                           | ama koko                         |
| removing unwanted materials     | ama mi lolo or mi ðeðe le aba me |
| pound mat                       | to aba                           |
| mat weaving                     | abalõnuwo                        |
| prune mat                       | abakeke                          |
| drying of weaving materials     | abalõnuwosiasia                  |
| spread mat                      | keke aba lo mlo aba              |
| straighten mat                  | dzo aba                          |
| throwing the weaving materials  | abadadaaloabalõnuwo dada         |
| tie mat                         | bla aba                          |

**Source:** Author (2024)

**Table 2:**  
*Expressions involving mat at the production stage*

| English gloss (literal meaning) | Ewe expressions |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| fix mat                         | de aba          |
| pull mat                        | he aba          |
| squeeze mat                     | mia aba         |
| lay mat                         | ðo aba          |
| sit on mat                      | noðe aba dzi    |

**Source:** Author (2024)

**Table:**  
*Expressions involving mat at the post-production stage*

| English gloss (literal meaning)           | Ewe expressions      |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| someone holds or sticks on a mat          | lé aba               |
| deny someone of mat                       | te aba ame           |
| sleep on mat                              | ðoalõ ðe aba dzi     |
| kneel on mat                              | dze glo ðe aba dzi   |
| sells mat                                 | dzra aba             |
| mat reach someone's wall                  | aba de glijunaame    |
| plant taboo in mat or contaminate the mat | doguabaaloðukõna aba |
| pacifies mat                              | dzra aba ðo          |

**Source:** Author (2024)

## A. Pre-production expressions

### 1. Si (to cut or weed raw materials in special forms without unwanted materials)

The expression *si* is used when the raw material for the production of a mat is cut or weeded specially and selectively such that no unwanted materials are weeded and collected with the useful ones. The word *si* refers to the manner of cutting (weeding) in a given manner, the shrub or the raw material (*abalõnu*) for weaving mat. For example, *siketi*, *si ava* mean to cut reed and to cut sedgerespectively. The expressionat times evokes fear in mat producers because the cutting goes on inside water or a marshy area which often contains sharp objects and at times during the cutting process, they get wounded. On the other hand, this type of cutting gives some relief to the producers because no sorting is required to be done before the materials are dried; *si* - cutting or weed, in a special way without involving unwanted materials.

### 2. Ko (to use a sharp object to scrap off a surface)

The expression *ko abalõnu* is used by the Ewe language when a sharp object is used to scrape off the surface of something. Shaving the hair, bear and other body hairs using a knife to scrape the hair or off the skin surface uses the expression *ko* (or *fl* depending on the context). For example, *ko ta* (cut hair), *ko afuti* (weed farmland) or *ko lã* (to scrap the fur of an animal or to skin or the hide of an animal), (see Amegashie, 2017). The process involves scooping the hair from the base and then scrapping it off, and it is applied to cutting mat weaving materials when they are scrapped at the base from the surface of the soil. When the raw

materials used for mat production are scraped off so that the surface of the ground is exposed *ko* is used. Additionally, the weavers in Hatorgodo (mostly speakers of the Avenor dialect of Ewe) at times use *keto* meaning, “they scrape off the weaving material” in place of *ko*. This type of cutting is tedious because unwanted materials are also scrapped hence after the scrapping, separating the unwanted materials before the good ones are dried is very tedious. That is why the expression *abalõnuwokoko* always creates some anxiety in mat producers.

### 3. Wuabalõnu (to cut the materials in a bundle form)

The expression *wuabalõnu* literarily means to kill the weaving materials. The verb *wu* generally denotes or expresses ‘to kill’ in Ewe. For example, *wulã*, *wuati*. *Wuame* - to kill an animal, a tree, or a human being. When the weed is cut in bundle-like form or certain quantities very close to the ground, *wuis* used to describe it. For example, *wu be* means “to scrap or cut thatch”. *Wu* is used in mat production, to describe the cutting of raw material in quantity or bundle-like form. We can say a collection of materials scrapped at the same time looks like a bundle of scrapped materials attracts *wu*. The process involves gathering and cutting all at a go. Some respondents say the raw- material together with the immature ones is cut very close to the ground. Because of the long period this straw weed takes to get mature for use again, mat producers assumed that the weed is killed, hence the expression *wu* is used. The term is often used on the weaving material *afla* which looks like the straw grass. In the context of this expression, the *wuabalõnu* more or less refers to how the weaving materials are collectively gathered and mowed to the root level. They are swept with sharp materials such as sickles, machetes, cutlasses, etcetera.

**4. *qe mi le abal̃nu me* (remove unwanted materials from the collected material)**

Unwanted materials are referred to as *mi* (faeces or faecal matter) in the context of weaving when selecting good materials from unwanted ones. The expression *qe mi le abal̃nu me ormiqedele abal̃nu me* literally means ‘to remove fecal matter from the weaving material. It is used by mat producers to describe the means of separating the unwanted materials from the useful ones after cutting, during drying or after drying. For example, *qe mi le keti me* ‘remove unwanted material from reed’ *qe mi le ava me* ‘remove unwanted material from sedge’. This expression occurs after the scrapping of the materials (*si*, *ko* or *wu*).

**5. *da abal̃nu* (selected good material for weaving)**

When the good materials are selected from the unwanted ones, a collection of the useful ones are described as those which are thrown viz *da*. This expression *da abal̃nu* literally means ‘to throw weaving material’ or *abal̃nudada*; the act of throwing weaving material. During the process, the dried material is held and thrown like a spear; that is *ketiwo dada* ‘reeds throwing’. The act of throwing the weaving materials *da abal̃nu* is a post-separation expression denoting a collection or group of useful weaving materials. During the selection process, the materials are thrown forward leaving the unwanted ones at where the weeded materials are heaped hence the birth of the expression *da abal̃nu*. We can say *da keti*, *da ava* ‘throw reed’ and ‘throw sedge’ respectively. This act of separation is even repeated after the weaving materials are dried so that only the most useful ones are gathered. Any time an unwanted weaving material is rejected or taken out as being not useful from the useful ones, the

expression *da is* used. When the materials are dried, they are sorted according to height, size, weight and even colour. Often, some of the materials are dyed when dried and they sort the good ones for producing mats. So, the process of sorting good material from unwanted ones usually welcomes the expression *daabal̃nu* which literally to throw the weaving material. Though the material is thrown like how a spear or javelin is thrown, the sense behind it is separation or sorting rather than just the act of throwing.

**6. *siaabal̃nu* (to dry the weaving material)**

The raw material is dried usually in the sun. The expression *siaabal̃nu* means to dry the weaving materials. When the weaving materials are cut fresh and gathered or bundled, they are brought to where they are dry-dried; an open place or a shade-less place where the freshly cut material could have direct contact with sunshine and air. The materials are placed in the sun and spread in singles on the floor in the open for sun and air to dry. When it is about to rain, they are quickly collected into shades for they get spoilt when the rains beat them. During rainy seasons, air drying is done in rooms or shades where sticks are put across the walls in a room and the materials are spread on them. They are also spread on corridors of buildings, and floors of huts for the air to dry. *Sia* is used to denote any form of drying fresh and wet materials in the air or airy space but when an already dried material is spread in the sun, *to re* ‘cross the sun’ is used. *Tso ye*, is not meant to dry the material but to get some warmth, and get some ants and insects to leave the material. Also, the drying hardens the material for easy pounding, especially in the case of *keti* ‘reed’ which is usually pounded before

being used to weave *ketiba* ‘reed mat’, locally called *afetɔgoo* “landlord goo”

### 7. **de aba (to fix or set mat)**

The expression *de aba* refers to the act and process of fixing the weaving materials into the threads in the loom. *De* “to fix something on parts of another or into another” as in, *de ka kɔ* “fix rope on the neck”, *de ka afɔ* which is fixed rope on the feet *de aba* ‘to fix weaving materials in the threads of the loom or the weaving frame’. In mat production *de aba* describes the weaving process of putting the materials through the fixed ropes or threads in the wood frame or loom one by one and making them tight in the ropes or threads. Usually, the materials are picked and fixed by hand.

### 8. **lɔ aba (to weave mat)**

The use of *lɔ aba* describes the technique of the entire process of weaving the mat; not just fixing the materials in the loom but tightening the hem to achieve the desired hardness of the mat, the thickness, shape, design, length or width and height. In the loom, the materials are also fixed onto the yarns. One of the respondents explained *lɔ aba* by saying, if the right thickness, pressing, spacing and shaping is to be determined during the weaving process, then *lɔ aba* ‘to weave mat’ is used to express the phenomenon, hence *de*(to fix) is used if the focus is on fixing the weaving materials in the yarn and *lɔ* is used if the focus is on pressing the fixed materials to get the right shapes, sizes, thicknesses, spaces, length among others during mat production.

### 9. **bla aba (to tie mat)**

*Bla aba* is a technique of weaving a type of local mat called *tsatsa* in the Ewe language. In the production of this mat (*tsatsa*), a rope is used to tie tightly small

collections of the sledge (*ava*) or the reed (*keti*), thus the weaving materials in a given order, spacing and style. A respondent explains that the dry sledge or reed tied to form the mat makes noise *tsatsatsa* when one touches or steps on the mat hence the name *tsatsa* for the mat. Another respondent says all kinds of mat produced through tying with rope bear the name *tsatsa*. Both etymological expressions are convincing. Additionally, the process of weaving by collecting a handful of the sledge or reed and tying them form nodes in the mat and the formation of this noted at equal spacing or distances in the mat is called *kpododo*, meaning thus, forming ridges, mounds or nodes side by side until the required size is attained before the weaving process has begun. *Kpododo* is a pre-weaving process. The materials are tied at the base at appreciable sizes and shapes just like how brooms are tied. Since the first preparation is done, that is, *kpododo*, the weaving of the mat *tsatsa* becomes easy as compared to the weaving of *ketiba* ‘reed mat’. Let us note that *ketiba* is different from *ketitsatsa* (mat produced through tying the reed) or *avatsatsa* (mat produced through tying the sledge). Usually, ropes made from the leaves of the date palm are used for weaving *tsatsa* using the tying process. The bamboo mat is made from this process where pieces of split bamboo are tied to form a mat.

### 10. **nye aba /abalɔnu (strung the weaving material)**

The weaving materials are arranged in an order and their bases are tied with a string to form a strand to the length of the mat and the weaving material is held with nearby ones in the strand and woven to form a complete strand. The act of forming a strand of mat in the defined manner to make a given design is described as ‘nye’. A respondent explained *nye* as ‘to tie the material with string at the base to form

strands. Materials like thatch, straw grass, reed, sledge, palm leaves and branches, coconut leaves and branches, raffia palm leaves and branches, date palm leaves and branches, and others when their bases are tied with strings or ropes to form strands for further weaving, 'nye' is used to describe it. In some mat-weaving communities, the straw grass called in 'afla' in Ewe is what they usually use in weaving hence they attribute 'nye' to weaving the straw grass. Coconut and palm branches when woven are used for fences and to cover barns of maize etc. It is observed that during the weaving of this particular mat (*aflaba*, - straw grass mat), the materials are first arranged in a yarn which the workers termed as *afladede ka me* (fixing the straw grass into a rope). After this, the material is twisted from the base through to its end. Therefore, weavers use the expression *nye afla* to describe this type of weaving instead of *lɔ afla*.

#### 11. *ɔe aba le ka me* (remove the mat from the rope)

The expression, *ɔe aba le ka me* refers to the act of removing the mat from the yarn. Some respondents explained that *ɔe aba le ka me* and *tofofona aba* thus "knitting the mat" goes hand in hand. They explained that before the removal of the mat from the yarn, the edges of the mat were knitted so that parts of the woven mat would not get removed or scattered. After the knitting, any unwanted material hanging on the mat is picked off or cut off with a sharp knife. The removal of the final unwanted material on the woven mat is referred to as *aba kekeorke aba* thus 'plucking the mat'. The plucking is done to smoothen the surface of the mat or to clean the mat from unwanted materials hanging on it to make the mat look beautiful.

#### B. Post-production terminologies or expressions

The post-production expressions include *ɔo aba*, *nɔ aba dzi / nu* and *mlɔ aba dzi*, *ɔoame aba dzi* mean "lay mat, sit on a mat, lie on a mat, set a person on a mat" respectively. These connote a purpose laying of the mat for some temporal or permanent events. The Ewe people lay mats for purposes such as for sleeping, divination and other special events. They do the same during the performance of some rituals, for chiefs to put their feet on it, during marriage and naming ceremonies, funerals and even in the performance of twins' rites. The semantics of terminologies of laying and sitting on mats have the same propositional senses but differ under situations or contexts that define the manner and purpose of the mat laying and sitting on the mat. The analysis is as follows:

#### 12. *ɔo aba* (lay mat, - lay mat in case of for domestic uses or purposes)

The expression *ɔo aba* 'lay mat' in this context means that the mat is laid or spread in a given form for anybody at all to use for a defined reason. This expression connotes a purposed mindset surrounding the laying. Ewe people do not lay mat unless they intend to use it at that material moment. It is taboo to lay a mat down at certain places especially outside without sleeping on it. It depicts some ritual performance and invitation of some spirits to use it hence mats are not laid down and left in the open according to the beliefs of most Ewe people. It is only in bedrooms that mats are laid or dressed down and left like that. They lay mats as beds to sleep on during the day for relaxation, during the night and in workplaces to put their babies on it. Ewe people lay sick people in bed when treating them, usually with herbs. Mats are not allowed to be laid and used as seats, no



eating on mats and males and females who are not couples do not lay on the same mat. A purposed mat laying is predominant among the Ewe people. The concept of **ɔo aba (set mat; - does to lay or set the mat for ritual purposes)** is ‘to set the mat ready’ for a specific purpose which in this case denoted ritual purposes. The mat can be laid for individuals to use for specific periods and purposes. After the period elapses, the person either continues or discontinues using it. These are analyzed as follows:

**a. Expressions surrounding the permanent laying of mat**

**13. ɔosrɔba (lay martial mat)**

The expression *ɔosrɔba* means lay or spread marital bed *orsrɔbaɔoɔo* - laying of marriage mat, is one of the permanent laying of mat (bed) among the Ewe people. *Aba ɔoɔonasrɔɔwo* or *srɔbaɔoɔo* “laying of mat for couples” is one of the rituals performances during the marriage ceremony among the Ewe people. The special mat is being laid for him or her with their spouses only to use. The purpose of laying this mat is not different from the one laid for anyone at all to use but has a notion of intercourse behind it rather than mere lying on the bed for sleeping purposes. The Ewes undergo this ritual known as *srɔbaɔoɔooraba ɔoɔonasrɔɔwo* as a sign of laying a strong foundation for the (Ewe people) marriages. In the course of the marriage, the officiant of the marriage ceremony (traditional leader) lays the mat and plays the couple on it at a certain number of times, depending on the clans of the groom. The couples henceforth use that mat (bed) till death. Once the mat is laid, and the couples are placed on it, that mat becomes sacred and no other woman or man will be allowed to sit, sleep on it or touch it. When another person uses it, the Ewes believe that the mat is defiled or contaminated and certain rituals must be

performed to cleanse it or the mat must be destroyed totally and another one prepared. Prayers are said on that mat alongside some incantations by the performers of the marriage rites. During the death of one of the couples, a similar mat is bought and torn apart and laid in the coffin of the deceased as his or her portion of the split or the broken bond of marriage between them. The torn mat is laid in the coffin before other things are laid in the coffin, and then the corpse is put on it. It is even believed that when couples or their children are sick with certain diseases, portions of that sacred mat can be tied around their wrist or neck and they will be cured. The term **ɔo aba** is also used metaphorically as an insinuation against females to mean a female prostitute. Significantly, mat-laying rituals are reverend in Ewe culture.

**14. ɔoeveba /evebaɔoɔo (lay twins’ mat)**

The term *ɔoeveba* or *evebaɔoɔo* is not different from the ordinary laying of bed but this one is for religious or ritual purposes. This concept of laying mat involves the laying of mats for twins, triplets etc., and their parents and other multiple birth purposes. The Ewes consider giving birth to twins as a special birth that needs special care, reverence and worship, so it is even a taboo to maltreat twins or their parents, divorce their mother, deny them certain requests and refuse to perform given rituals. Even anyone who puts his or her hands or fingers into the ritual pot prepared for twins without consent becomes kleptomania. When twins or their parents are sick or in need, it is believed that sipping water from the twin’s pot or sprinkling water from that pot onto their bodies or laying them on the ritual twin mat facilitates easy healing and cure.

Any time a couple gives birth to twins, special rites are performed for them

known as *evekɔnu*, 'twins rites' which include *evebaɔɔɔ* (laying the twin's ritual mat). After the rituals, the mat (*eveba*) is kept in a particular room permanently as a symbol of love for the couples. The twins, if they are mixed sexes (boys and girls). They are also placed on the same mat and a special ritual is performed for them as well. This is to prevent them from seeing one another as husband and wife if they are lying on the same mat (bed). The terminologies accompanied by laying of the mat which lasts for a certain period after which the person discontinues the usage include setting or laying of the mat for just a short period for a definite purpose.

15. **ɔoahoba** /ahobaɔɔɔ (lay widowhood mat).

This expression is used when the rite is being performed especially for a woman who loses her husband, as a symbol of trustworthiness, as well as separating the common bed shared between the dead and the living. This mat ritual ends the permanence of marital mat laying during a performance of marriage rites and marriage.

**b. Temporally laying of mat:**

16. **ɔoafāba/afabaɔɔɔ**(lay divination mat)

*ɔoafaba*, "lay afa mat" (lay mat for divination) This expression in one sense means, that the mat is laid for a person who enters the *afa* cult as a new member. However, in general terms, any time a divination exercise is going to take place, the mat is laid and that mat is a special mat for that purpose only. Another meaning behind the use of the term *afabaɔɔɔ* is consultation between the humans and the spirit being. When a person known as *tɔbokɔ* 'diviner' lays a mat known as *afaba* and displays some regalia on it, it is said that

*woɔafaba*. Also, when the *tɔbokɔ* lays the mat anytime and receives a message from the spirits to anyone who needs it, the process is termed a *fabaɔɔɔ* 'divination'.

17. **ɔoyeveba/ yeveaɔɔɔ** (lay yeve cult mat)

Another post-production expression is *ɔoyeveba* "lay yeve mat". This is another rite similar to *afabaɔɔɔ*. During the process, the mat is laid for a new member who joins the yeve cult, which is *hūsikpɔkpɔ*. Like any other ritual, the laying of *yeveba* is meant for the new members and their spouses to use till the member completes the ritual cycle and becomes a full member. This means that the couples will no longer use their marriage mat *srɔba* as long as the one remains *hūsikpɔkpɔ* in the cult. After the laying of the various mats (beds), one common objective is for the users to sit on it to attain its purpose or the impact it intends to make. The following explains the meaning of the expressions on mat usage: *nɔ aba dzi* means sit on mat and *mlɔ aba dzi* means lay on mat respectively.

18. **nɔ aba dzí** (sit on a mat).

*Nɔ* means 'to sit' and the term expression *nɔ aba dzí* means "sit on a mat". This is the act of sitting on the mat that is laid or placed on the ground. The Ewes sit on a mat at home in times of sickness and in good health. They also sit on mats during some cultural practices to perform rituals. For instance, a woman whose husband died sits on the mat beside the dead body on stage to prove her innocence. The expression used in this context spouse is dead, whether they are still together or not, they undergo a ritual to separate the mat (bed) they both once shared. This is what the Ewes termed as *ahobadzinɔnɔ*, "sitting on widowhood mat". Other terminologies associated with sitting on mat include;

*nɔvebadzi* “sit on twins mat”, *nɔafābadzi* “sit on àfā mat” etcetera for the performance of one ritual or another.

**19. nɔ aba dzí/ nɔ aba nu** (sit at the edge of mat)

The expression is associated with funerals when widowhood rites are being performed *ame la nɔkuba nu*. When a woman particularly loses her husband, when the man is laid in state, she is supposed to sit on a mat spread in front of the corpse or sit by it and fan the corpse occasionally. This is to prove her fidelity to the deceased and the family.

**20. mlɔ aba dzí** (lie on or in a mat)

*Mlɔ aba dzí* means to lie on a mat (bed). The meaning of the term *abadzímɔmlɔ* can be looked at from different perspectives, depending on the context in which the laying is done and the nature of the laying. When the person does the act, it is termed *anyímɔmlɔ* “laying down” minus *aba* (the mat will not be mentioned). In the case of the dead, when the body is lying on a mat that is laid in state, the Ewes term it *ameḍoḍo agba nu / amedḍoḍo aba nu* “putting a body on the side of the stage”. When the term is used, the understanding is that the dead body is worthy to be observed by the public. Also, the way of giving last respect to the person before it finally goes to the spirit world. Moreover, when somebody lay on a mat for a short period, the Ewes especially the Anlo people term it *ziɔziɔ* ‘means leaning’. *Ame ḍoḍo aba* or *amedḍoḍo agba nu* or *amedḍoḍo aba nu* is usually used for dead bodies or corpses when they are dressed for viewing or when they are laid in state. With regards to lying in bed, living people also lay in the bed on which their deceased relatives were laid in state for a week in the past but that has changed now.

Another similar act is *ameḍoḍo aba dzí* which refers to the act of setting the person on a mat for some rituals to be performed. They count the person some number of times and set him or her on the mat. During marriage ceremonies and the performances of some rituals for healing, cleansing, chieftaincy and arbitration among others, a person is set on a mat till the ceremony or the ritual is completed. There are some figurative expressions about the use of mat among the Ewe. The following look at some of them and their semantics aspects.

**21. lé aba** (bed ridden)

The expression *lé aba* or *amealé aba* refers to the condition where one is bedridden and cannot wake up due to a severe sickness. When a sick person becomes very weak and cannot sit or walk about but is only seen lying, they say the sickness made him *lé aba* – be ridden, which literarily means catch mat. In Ewe bed and mat are often synonymous. In Ewe, *ame* refers to a human or a person being both living and dead. The verb *lé* means to catch or to hold. So when somebody or something holds or catches another thing by any means, and there is physical contact between them, Ewes describes it as *lé*. For example, *lélākplemɔ* “catch the animal with a trap”, *léati, kpleasi* “hold a stick with hand”. Therefore, the propositional meaning of the Ewe expression *amealé aba* - is “a person holds mat or catches mat”. Contextually, the expression *amealé aba* means someone’s health condition is very bad to the extent that he /she cannot get up from bed. It is assumed that the sick person’s body gets to hold onto the mat tightly, hence the expression *ame la, lé aba* instead of saying that *ḍɔsěnaame la* “the sickness becomes very critical”. The expression *ḍɔsěnaame la* may invoke fear and anxiety in both the speaker and the listener. Therefore, *lé aba* is used to tone down the emotional feelings of

the listener. This made the expression euphemistic.

## 22. **te aba ame (to deny one a mat)**

The expression *te aba ame* means to deny someone a mat which is used in contexts referring to situations where a couple denies the other sexual intimacy. The expression means literally ‘to pull a mat at a person.’ When married couples refuse to have sexual intercourse, they say *wote aba wo nɛwo* means they deny each other mat (bed). Among the Ewe people, during marriage ceremonies, they count couples some number of times and set them on the mat. This becomes a covenant between the couples and they are forbidden from denying each other bedding or refusing to share a bed for no reason. The purpose of setting a bed in marriage is for sexual intercourse and for sleeping together; couples are forbidden from sleeping apart for no reason. Right, the bed is separated because of quarrels or misunderstandings, sexual affairs also cease and the marriage is on the verge of collapsing and we say *te aba*. Generally, the expression *tenaneame* means to deny someone of something. So the propositional meaning of the expression *te aba ame* is to deny a partner a sexual right. In this context, *aba* is used metaphorically to mean sexual intercourse. This act is a taboo and believed to result in death, diseases and misfortunes.

## 23. **dɔlébadzi (on a sick bed/mat)**

*Dɔ* means sleep or sickness in Ewe. In everyday greetings, they say *edɔa* or *èdɔnyuiá?* or “have you slept well?”. So, the propositional meaning of the expression *le dɔ-lé-ba-dzi* means one is on a sick bed. In another similar expression *dɔ le aba dzi* meaning have intercourse in bed. It is taboo to sleep with a woman in any other place than on a mat or in bed. This is because it is an abomination to mention sex freely

without hedging it among the Ewe people. They use *aba* in the expression because it is the only convenient and appropriate thing to be lied in for sex among Ewe people and nothing else. So the expression *wodɔle aba dzi* “they sleep with each other in the mat”, means have sex. The expression *dɔ* is in this context signifying sexual intercourse.

## 24. **dzeklo le aba dzi (Kneel on a mat)**

The phrase *dzeklole aba dzi* means ‘kneel and *dɛ* ‘be at’ verb, Dathie (1996), and *aba dzi* ‘on the mat’. Therefore, the propositional meaning of the expression *dzeklole aba dzi* is to kneel at a certain position on the mat’. The Ewes use this expression as a connotative meaning for the position assumed by a pregnant woman during labour. The woman in labour is made to kneel during labour to deliver her baby. So after the delivery, the Ewes use the expression *dzeklole aba dzi* to mean the woman has given birth. It is a tradition that pregnant women must give birth on the mat, so if a pregnant woman delivers on a different thing than a mat, the birth is considered strange. In this regard, Ewes have circumstantial names for those babies who are born in other places apart from a mat. The expression *dzeklole aba dzi* means ‘one has given birth’. The expression connotes happiness to both speakers and listeners because of the newborn baby.

## Findings

It is understood that mat weavers and users have expressions on production processes. These expressions are dependent on the type, nature, use and processes involved in producing the mat. Each expression has more than one meaning components; two or more expressions are associated with a common meaning. Examples are; *ko* and *wu*, *feandze*, *nyre* and *nye* etcetera.

## Conclusion

The study sought to find out the meaning of some expressions that are associated with mat production among the Ewe people. It examined the terms from the pre-weaving stage, weaving to post-weaving stages. The meanings of some of the expressions are based on the meaning of the individual words that compose the expression. On the contrary, the semantics of some of the expressions differ completely from the individual words and their make-ups found in the expressions.

## Declaration of interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing interest financially or otherwise to declare. Both authors worked assiduously on all aspects of the paper in full capacity.

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